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25 September 2013

Mr John Ferguson
Headteacher
Irlam and Cadishead College
Station Road
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Dear Mr Ferguson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Irlam and Cadishead College, Salford

Following my visit to your school on 24 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- Improve results in English and mathematics at grades GCSE A*-C more rapidly.
- Improve the monitoring and progress tracking of students in Key Stage 4 to better target appropriate and focused intervention strategies that support improved progress
- Refocus the observation and evaluation of teaching and learning so that it informs on how better to improve student outcomes
- Develop the student voice and use students better to support improvement initiatives and the establishment of an aspirational culture within the school.
- Visit best practice schools to inform on monitoring and tracking systems that are accurate, regularly reviewed and contribute to improved outcomes.
- Work with middle leaders to promote their understanding of best practice within their subject areas and how they can best achieve it within the challenges and context of the school

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, and three governors including the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection and my first monitoring visit. In particular school data on the unvalidated GCSE results for 2012/13 were discussed. I met with a representative of the local authority to discuss the school's progress and how best to support the school. Short visits were made to several lessons and informal discussions were held with students and staff. I also conducted a training session on improving teaching and learning with the learning and teaching coaches.

Main Findings.

The school's unvalidated GCSE results for 2013 indicate a 6% decrease in the proportion of students attaining five good GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics, in comparison with 2012. Senior leaders and governors acknowledge that this decline, in such a key indicator, is unacceptable. Too many able students do not achieve to their expected level or above. Significant gaps have not been closed for different groups of students. There was a decline in the percentage of students awarded higher grades. One positive trend has been a narrowing of the gap between those pupils who have additional support provided through pupil premium funding.

An immediate refocus of approaches to the observation and improvement of teaching and learning and student monitoring and progress tracking is required. I discussed with you, senior managers and middle leaders approaches to improving teaching and learning. A stronger focus is required on student progress, the key learning for students in a given lesson and how that is best brought about. Subject leaders need to take greater accountability for the quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility ensuring that their judgments are realistic and reflect actual student progress and outcomes. I also discussed with you and senior leaders a number of approaches as to how subject leaders could access the best practice in managing their subject areas. I have asked you to ensure that progress monitoring is both accurate and regular and that there are timely reviews of progress for both senior managers and governors. You have agreed to undertake a visit to a secondary school where a highly successful programme of monitoring, progress tracking and intervention has enabled a rapid improvement in GCSE results at grades A*-C.

There is an improved focus on reading and numeracy at key stage 3 and evidence that student reading ages have improved. However there remains a palpable lack of a strong reading and aspirational culture among students. I have asked you to consider ways of improving the reading and aspirational culture of the school. We discussed ways in which student mentors, both at key stage 4 and sixth form, could be used to support and inspire younger students. We also discussed a more central role for the library in promoting greater opportunities, challenge and variety in reading. The school has a bedrock of able and articulate students who could make a significant contribution to the promotion of reading, and high aspirations; these students need to be motivated and given opportunities to make such a contribution.

The governing body now has a realistic understanding of the school's sluggish and poor performance in Key stage 4 results. They understand the urgency in holding senior leaders to account and in monitoring their progress towards rapid improvement. In the current academic year governors will focus strongly on progress monitoring and improved teaching and learning. They will also be increasing their engagement with staff and students to better understand their challenges, perspectives and needs. Above all governors clearly stated to me their determination to work towards the eradication of underperformance which has characterised this school for too long.

External support

The school has received support from the local authority adviser who has worked with senior leaders to improve aspects of quality assurance. In particular a support package using consultants has enabled a stronger focus on developing such aspects as improved teaching and learning, quality assurance in mathematics and English, internal lesson observation and evaluation and better data analysis and assessment systems. The headteacher and senior staff have agreed to further consult with best practice schools and consider new ideas to enable improvement within school quality assurance systems and operational planning. On my next visit I will evaluate the impact of these initiatives closely.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Salford.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- ☐ Chair of the Governing Body
- ☐ Director of Children's Services, Salford.