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27 September 2013

Mrs Lynn Nicholls
Headteacher
Sale High School
Norris Road
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Cheshire
M33 3JR

Dear Mrs Nicholls

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sale High School, Trafford

Following my visit to your school on 26 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- sharpen the school development plan so it is clear about who is responsible for leading and monitoring the various actions, and explains how the impact of these will be evaluated
- ensure that the attainment gap between students supported by the pupil premium funding and their peers is narrowed as quickly as possible

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the associate headteacher, middle leaders, the Chair and three other members of the Governing Body, two representatives from the local authority and two groups of students. I evaluated the school action plan and scrutinised other key documentation. I also had the opportunity to accompany you on a tour of the school and visit two assemblies.

Context

In September an associate headteacher joined the school from the local teaching school. She will remain at Sale High School for at least a year.

Main findings

You and your team have moved on very swiftly from your initial disappointment about the last inspection judgement. You have wasted no time at all in using it as a catalyst for a renewed focus on the next stage on your journey of improvement. Without exception, everyone I met in the school community, during my visit, spoke about how far this school had already come on that journey.

The school development plan, which has been written in response to the recent inspection, focuses closely on the areas for improvement which were highlighted. It includes a wide range of actions which are taking place but it is not always clear who is responsible for leading, monitoring and evaluating their impact.

All staff in school are now in no doubt that the main priority is the progress that every student makes rather than overall attainment figures. Since the last inspection, there has been a tangible change of culture across the school in relation to students' targets. All students are given targets based on four levels of progress. The rationale for this has been clearly explained to students, staff and parents and it has been embraced by everyone. The students in particular relish the challenge that they have been set. Those I spoke to were unanimously positive about this, saying, 'we've got something to work up to' and, 'this motivation gives us something to go towards'. They liked the fact that teachers were, 'always pushing you on and challenging you'. The amount of time staff are investing in the Raising Achievement Programme and the Good to Great Programme is evidence of their commitment to ensuring that all students make the best possible progress.

Headline figures in both attainment and progress measures increased in 2013 and the school's robust tracking data indicates that this trend is set to continue. However, while the attainment of students overall is increasing, the gap between students supported by the pupil premium and their peers is not narrowing. You are aware of this and it is a focus, in particular, for all middle leaders this year, but this has to become a top priority for everyone in school.

In order to increase the proportion of good or better teaching across the school, all teachers and some teaching assistants are taking part in weekly training. The Developing Outstanding Teaching Programme has real strengths. An important element of the training is the way teachers can evaluate its effectiveness by tracking the impact it is having on their students' progress. After only a few weeks, the training is already having impact in many classrooms. Teachers are creating more opportunities for students to become actively engaged in their own learning. They are also being much clearer about sharing success criteria with students which is helping them to make good progress.

Middle leaders are also taking part in training throughout this term. One head of department said that she felt everyone had 'bought into' this development programme and she welcomed the way they were all learning from each other. The middle leaders I spoke to felt more empowered and confident about holding the staff in their departments to account. There is a strong sense of shared responsibility between senior and middle leaders.

The Chair of the Governing Body said he was 'utterly devastated' by the recent inspection judgement, but like you, he quickly took stock and reflected on the content of the report. Having done this he soon realised that although improvements had been made there were still areas which required further attention. The governors I spoke to are astute and have a clear understanding of what the school needs to do in order to secure a good judgement at the next inspection. They have the skills and capacity to hold you to account as you lead the school further on its journey of improvement.

The significant increase in the number of families attending your recent open evening and the overwhelmingly positive feedback which you received is evidence of the impact of the improvements you have already made. As one parent said, 'the atmosphere, attitudes, school ethos and enthusiasm for learning were clear tonight'.

External support

The partnership with the local teaching school has already been a significant factor in driving forward the improvements across the school. Senior leadership capacity has been improved with the arrival of the associate headteacher from the teaching school.

Before the recent inspection the local authority's involvement had been mainly supporting the school's focus on improving behaviour and attendance. The school improvement advisor is now working more closely with the school. She is working in particular with the humanities department and carrying out joint observations with senior leaders

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne

Her Majesty's Inspector