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Mr Will Daunt
Headteacher
De La Salle School
Mill Brow
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St Helens
Merseyside
WA10 4QH

Dear Mr Daunt

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to De La Salle School, St. Helens

Following my visit to your school on 14 November 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 September 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:

- ensure staff have a clear understanding and ownership of the objectives in the school's action plan
- ensure that actions prioritise the most important issues, particularly those relating to teaching and learning
- link with similar schools that have a good track record in improving outcomes for students eligible for the pupil premium

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, students, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated.

Main findings

Since the last inspection senior leaders, middle leaders and governors have shifted their focus from student attainment (which was consistently above the national average) to student achievement and in doing so have recognised that too many students do not make as much progress as they are capable of making.

Middle leaders are now beginning to monitor student progress with greater regularity and rigour. They are at the early stages of analysing progress and are now more accountable for the performance of their teams and for students' learning.

Leaders have also recognised that their previous strong focus on supporting students on the C/D border-line did not necessarily help other students, such as higher attainers or those eligible for the pupil premium, to reach their full potential. Teachers are now being encouraged to set realistic, yet aspirational targets for all students, in all subjects.

Actions are in place to improve teaching and learning. The regular sharing of good practice and focussed training days are addressing issues such as encouraging students to 'engage with learning' rather than 'comply with teaching'. The majority of teaching and support staff share the view of leaders that lessons do need to engage students more and enable them to become independent and enthusiastic learners. However, not all are yet fully behind the school's objectives which could have a negative impact on the speed of improvements in teaching and learning.

The students I spoke to said that the quality of teaching and learning is a mixed picture. They enjoy lessons and learn well where they are able to ask for help when they need it, where activities are interesting and engaging, and where there is variety in the teaching methods. They are critical of lessons where teachers are impatient with them when they do not understand so they feel discouraged about asking questions, where they do the same sort of activities every lesson, if there are no opportunities for group work or discussion, and where teachers 'give you lots of writing but not enough time to complete it before moving on'. Worryingly, all of the students spoken to thought that some teachers displayed favouritism and this made a difference to how much help they would receive. When asked how many teachers they thought did this, they gave figures of between fifty and seventy per cent.

However, students were positive about the relationships they had with many staff and particularly enjoyed opportunities to engage with extra-curricular activities such as school trips. Year 7 students felt they had been well supported in settling into the school. But all were less than complementary about the rewards and sanction systems which they did not think were applied consistently and sometimes led to students being unfairly punished and others going unpunished. Students would prefer to have a better balance of rewards and sanctions with more rewards that students would value, including more positive comments being placed on SIMS which they think teachers forget to do.

The students were keen to have more subject clubs and out-of-school activities but did not think that their opinions on school issues, including teaching and learning were either sought or listened to. One girl said that she 'would like to see students being acknowledged more'. Only twenty per cent of those spoken to knew who their student council representative was and none could say what the council actually did. The Governing Body is

now planning to meet with a focus group of students to discuss progress in teaching and learning.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school is drawing on support offered by the local authority. A member of the senior leadership team recently attended a seminar on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the student voice that the local authority had brokered with Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). They are also offering subject leadership support for English and commissioning an ex HMI to work with schools that require improvement. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these initiatives on securing improvements in student outcomes. I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for St. Helens and as below.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer

Her Majesty's Inspector