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21 November 2013

Mr P Hart  
Headteacher  
Westhoughton High School  
Bolton Road  
Westhoughton  
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Lancashire  
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Dear Mr Hart

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Westhoughton High School, Bolton**

Following my visit to your school on 20 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.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the director of learning for mathematics, students, members of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's improvement plan and scrutinised other documentation provided by the school. I undertook a short learning walk with a member of the senior leadership team for a brief opportunity to observe teaching and see students' work.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection, there have been no changes to leadership staff. One member of the mathematics department has left and been replaced.

### **Main findings**

You and other staff in the school agree that the areas for improvement identified in the

September 2013 inspection report provide a helpful focus for moving the school forward. The school's improvement planning has been adapted to focus clearly on the key issues and is structured appropriately to enable you to monitor how quickly progress is being made.

The school's records show that students' achievement is set to rise in 2014, including in mathematics and including for the most able students. In mathematics, mock examinations in November 2013 compare favourably with similar results from the same time last year. In addition, more students are being entered for the higher tier examination and very few are entered early, and these two actions have the potential to raise students' aspirations further. Teachers are aware of the need to present examples of how mathematics can be applied to solve problems. An example was seen where pupils in Year 7 were developing problem-solving skills through investigating patterns on a grid. You have provided financial support for the mathematics department to purchase a new curriculum and assessment package. Staff report that, in its early days, the new curriculum is having a positive impact on students' motivation. Links with other schools have been established to support work in mathematics and in history; these have influenced the selection of curricular materials in mathematics and begun to have an impact on subject-level improvement planning.

You have set up a range of activities to improve the quality of teaching, including through sharing good practice. Students recognise some changes in teaching and report that teachers now respond more robustly when they have not produced sufficient work. The planned programme for teachers' professional development includes a focus on the issues identified in the inspection report and other issues identified by the school. You report that, as yet, staff have attended on a voluntary basis and that attendance at the first two sessions has been disappointing. You are aware of the need to ensure that all staff, particularly those with most to gain, attend appropriate training and demonstrate improved practice as a result.

You have recognised that, where the school's judgements on the quality of teaching have been generous, it is because observers placed too little emphasis on students' learning and progress. You have redesigned the form on which observers record their comments and now ensure that students' progress forms a limiting judgement. Senior leaders have undertaken learning walks, including one that focused specifically on mathematics, and provided useful feedback. Your decision to include appropriate external staff in joint lesson observations is crucial in validating the judgements of your senior staff and hence to moving forward the quality of teaching in the school.

You are aware that the school's predictions for GCSE results in 2013 were over-optimistic. The school has introduced what you believe to be a more rigorous process for monitoring students' progress, including that of key groups. As a result, managers are now able to check both the progress of different groups and the progress of students in particular teaching groups. However, the data system is in its early days and is yet to show an impact. You have started the process of checking that assessment results entered into the system are accurate and robust so that you can have full confidence in the system's effectiveness. This remains a vital step in the path to improving the school. It has the potential to hold staff, including leaders, to account more effectively as well as to identify where students are underachieving and trigger targeted interventions. You have established a link with a National Leader of Education but this is in the early stages and no meetings have yet taken place.

Governors are highly supportive of the school and keen for it to be as good as it can possibly be. They agree that the areas for improvement are appropriate. They accept the need to enhance their role further, such as playing an increased role in the appraisal of senior staff. They have plans in place to undergo training with the aim of acquiring the Governor Mark accreditation. Since the inspection, governors have enhanced their understanding of which student groups are being monitored closely by subject leaders. They have identified that particular members of the governing body should train further so that they can lead on the interpretation of data.

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 local authority has supported the school through setting up an Inspection Action Group, which includes representation from the local authority and an external consultant, as well as representatives from the school's senior leadership team and the governing body. The group has met once and so is not able to demonstrate impact as yet. The external consultant brought in by the local authority supported the school in drawing up its action plan and provided good advice to you and other school leaders. The regular meetings for heads of department in local schools facilitated links being made with a local Teaching School, which led to a modified curriculum in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers

**Her Majesty's Inspector**