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27 November 2013

Mr Mark Moorhouse  
Headteacher  
Matthew Moss High School  
Matthew Moss Lane  
Marland  
Rochdale  
Lancashire  
OL11 3LU

Dear Mr Moorhouse

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Matthew Moss High School, Rochdale**

Following my visit to your school on 26 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:

- develop a policy for numeracy across the school
- ensure that lesson observations focus on stretching and challenging all students
- ensure that governors can understand, analyse and interrogate progress data
- ensure that the reduction in exclusion rates are sustained.

### **Evidence**

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

### **Context**

Since the last inspection the school has appointed a new data manager and has installed new systems for data analysis. Two staff have been appointed as behaviour and

intervention coaches and the science department has appointed from January 2014, a new head of department and two new seconds in the department.

## **Main findings**

Matthew Moss is a school with a history of innovative practice. However, by your own and the governors' admission leaders and managers had 'taken their eye off the ball' with regard to how well students were achieving. You now recognise the need to make it clear to middle leaders and classroom teachers that they are accountable for students' outcomes across a range of measures, including examination results and the progress students make against their starting points.

To this end, you have moved quickly to address some key barriers. The appointment of a data manager and a new data management package is enabling leaders to analyse students' progress in detail for the first time. The school's new lesson observation pro-forma and feedback policy are designed to bring greater consistency to lessons; ensuring appropriate levels of challenge and support for all students. The new writing policy is helpful in focussing attention on developing students' subject-specific vocabulary and helping them to complete sustained pieces of writing as well as note-taking that is both clear and accurate. However, students perform less well in mathematics than they do in English and there is a need for a similar whole school numeracy policy.

Your decision to link with an outstanding teaching school in Northumberland that has a similar educational philosophy to your own should enable you to make the necessary improvements without compromising your stance on the importance of independent project-based learning, critical thinking and skills development. Your plans to share good practice through joint lesson observations and video links are already beginning to move teaching and learning forward. This is evident from increased proportion of students who are now meeting and exceeding expected levels of progress.

The focus you have put on improving outcomes for higher attaining students and those eligible for the pupil-premium through the Saturday School initiative at Rochdale College is particularly interesting. Similarly, it will be interesting to see the impact of the 'Breakthrough for Learning' training you have brokered to encourage the use of academic language in the classroom.

Since the last inspection the proportion of students who are temporarily excluded from school has fallen steeply. The work of the newly appointed behaviour and intervention coaches seems to be working well and your plans for further training for all staff on aspects of behaviour management is timely.

The students I met were very supportive of the opportunities they are given to work independently and follow their interests and aspirations. One student described independent learn as 'the beauty of learning in this school'. They often used the word 'freedom' when explaining what they liked most about being a student at Matthew Moss. However, they did not think that all students could cope equally well with the levels of independence they were given. They claimed that such students would often disrupt the learning of others and they were particularly resentful if this led to a whole class detention as it sometimes did.

Worryingly, all of the students I spoke with thought that the work was often too easy and when it was too difficult it was because the teacher had failed to explain it properly. Nevertheless, they appreciated the many trips, visits and visitors and felt that the school prepared them well to become life-long learners.

The governors admitted that the inspection had been 'a wake-up call' for the school. They were unaware that the pattern of exclusions was so high compared to similar schools or that many students were not making the levels of progress expected of them. You have already brokered a review of the Governing Body and this should include training on how to analyse school data so they are better able to hold you and the other senior leaders to account. The governors are very aware of the need to build in sustainability into key departments and to this end have approved the appointment of two seconds in department for mathematics, English and science. They particularly value your pragmatic approach and that you have moved quickly to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

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 (LA) is using their intervention fund to support the links you have made with a school in the North East. They have offered school to school support within the local authority but understand and respect your decision to broker this support for yourself. Your new data manager is attending the LA's assessment manager network meetings and he has visited Cardinal Langley School to share practice on using data systems. The LA also offered to broker the review of the Governing Body and offered a headteacher mentor but understand that you have already made arrangements for this. The LA now sees its role as one of monitoring progress and further supporting the school should they request it in the future.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**