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Mrs Kelly Dawson
Headteacher
ACERS East Lancashire Campus
Swindon Street
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Lancashire
BB11 4PF

Dear Mrs Dawson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to ACERS East Lancashire Campus, Lancashire

Following my visit with Denah Jones, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 3 December 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. 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 way in which the data are presented so that the progress made by students and groups of students is clearly evident; especially showing the progress made over time from individual starting points
- make all teachers responsible for the progress that students make in reading and for monitoring the range of books students read
- ensure that students with exceptionally low reading ages are taught to decode words using letter sound combinations (phonics) and read de-codable reading books
- as a matter of urgency, review the use of the Plumb Street Centre as off-site provision
- sharpen the way in which attendance data are presented so that governors can more easily monitor the attendance of individual students and groups of students
- review the leadership of English and mathematics across the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the you, other senior leaders, a group of students, a group of staff, the Chair of the Management Committee and a representative of the local authority. I also held a telephone conversation with a member of the Management

Committee. We observed four lessons and looked closely at students' assessment data, external reviews undertaken by the local authority, the single central record of staffing and the school's overview of the quality of teaching.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit a new, permanent Deputy Headteacher for Pastoral Care has been appointed. Some members of the Management Committee have left and have not yet been replaced.

Main findings

There has been sustained and very effective progress since the previous monitoring inspection. The centre now feels and operates as a unified institution, rather than three separate bodies that have been brought together. The response from each person spoken to by the inspectors was the same: this is a much happier and far more cohesive place to study and work. Adults and students alike call the centre 'a school' and there are plans to change the centre's name formally to include the designation 'school'. The changes make clear to all that this is indeed a place to learn, with specialist provision for students with very specific needs. The relocation of the vast majority of students into the main building has enabled the establishment of subject departments and areas for teaching mathematics, English and science. More students now have access to the full range of National Curriculum and vocational subjects and can pursue these to qualification level. The overwhelming majority of students go on to tertiary education or work placements. Students spoke warmly of the opportunity to 'get their exams' and go on to college.

The school has a much clearer picture of students' reading abilities and literacy levels and its data on students' wider GCSE or functional skills attainment and progress are much improved. However, it does not yet present all the data available in ways which are immediately helpful to governors and other external bodies. It is not easy, for example, to see the progress made by students who have been at the centre for three terms or more, two terms, one term or less. In 2013, the overwhelming majority of students taking vocational Level 1 qualifications gained passes. Students' weak reading and literacy skills are impeding their progress to higher levels in vocational and GCSE qualifications. Students' success in communication qualifications is not as strong as it is in numeracy; even when they are entered for two types of qualification. In 2013, some students did not achieve A*-G in English/communication at any level. Students who attend the school's own off-site provision, The Plumb Street Centre, do not achieve well. This provision is for the centre's most challenging and disruptive students. During this inspection, Her Majesty's Inspectors and the headteacher were unable to contact the off-site provision. The school leaders and chair of governors are, rightly, considering how best to manage the needs of this group of students.

The school has made improvements to its provision for reading: staff have undertaken an audit of books and reorganised the stock. A new system of reading and literacy support for students with low reading ages has been implemented and all students are encouraged to read during form-tutor time; this period is led by teaching assistants. However, two major factors are holding back students' progress in reading. Some students still have exceptionally low reading ages, such that they are unable to decode (break down) new words when they meet them. This group of students needs urgent support to learn the

letter-sound combinations (phonics) which will help them decode new words. Other students have reading ages which are lower than their birthday ages but show that they have some decoding skill. They need to read a greater volume of books, including a wider range of increasingly more challenging texts. Currently, it is not clear whether anybody is guiding and monitoring the wider reading that students undertake, nor what role subjects, other than English, play in supporting students' reading.

Students' behaviour and the management of their behaviour on the main site are much improved. Staff and students spoken to agree that the whole-school behaviour policy is being implemented consistently by all staff. Students understand that there will be consequences to their actions. Within lessons, inspectors observed no poor behaviour. They did observe incidences of challenging behaviour at other times, which were skilfully handled by staff.

Leadership and management are much improved. The appointment of the deputy headteacher to lead on pastoral matters has had a considerable impact on the way in which behaviour is managed. The headteacher continues to provide clear direction, supported by the deputy for achievement. The greatest improvement is evident in the challenge and depth of understanding now shown by the Chair of Governors and some governors. They raised concerns about the presentation of attendance data for specific groups of students and shared their concerns about the off-site provision. Improvements to the quality of teaching are evident: the result of teachers working together and undertaking more professional development. However, inspectors observed some very good practice in lessons which is not used widely; it was not clear to inspectors which staff were leading on developments in English and mathematics to ensure that best practice becomes the norm.

External support

The local authority school improvement partner has a very accurate view of the school. The positive impact of the support and challenge provided is evident in the progress made to date by the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington
Her Majesty's Inspector