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Mrs Alison Wright
Headteacher
Newall Green High School
Greenbrow Road
Wythenshawe
Manchester
M23 2SX

Dear Mrs Wright

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Newall Green High School

Following my visit to your school on 23 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged as having serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in November 2012. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is not making enough progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Manchester.

Yours sincerely,

Vincent Ashworth
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2012

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better by:
 - providing more high quality training, ensuring all teachers attend such training and checking to see that good practice is applied in the classroom
 - making sure that individual teachers act swiftly on advice and instructions given to improve their teaching
 - ensuring all teachers mark work regularly and thoroughly, so that students have clear advice about how to make their work and learning better.
- Raise achievement in mathematics by improving the teaching of this subject in the following ways:
 - ensuring that all teachers design lessons that are well-matched to the needs of students, with appropriate support and challenge
 - encouraging students to apply their skills in a range of problem-solving activities that are related to the real world, so that students understand the importance of improving their numeracy skills.
- Improve attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average and reduce rates of exclusion further.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring all subject leaders are rigorous in following up identified weaknesses in their area of responsibility
 - making sure governors have a sharper focus on improving achievement and are more effective in holding the school to account for such improvement.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 23 January 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, a group of students from Year 11, a group of teachers and a representative from the local authority. The inspector observed five lessons in a range of subjects including English, mathematics, geography and modern languages. Senior leaders accompanied the inspector during observations of teaching. The primary focus of visits to lessons was to determine the extent of improvements in teaching that had taken place since the last inspection and the extent to which higher-ability students were receiving sufficient challenge in their learning. The inspector also looked closely at documentary evidence provided by the school which included minutes of governing body meetings, the school's draft self-evaluation, reports from external monitoring carried out by the local authority and other consultants as well as data related to attendance and exclusions.

Context

There have been a number of significant changes to staffing since the last monitoring inspection in June 2013. Seven new teachers joined the mathematics department in September 2013. Two mathematics teachers left the school during the autumn term and two more are due to leave in February 2014. Two new teachers have joined the English department and one in science. Temporary cover is in place in humanities to cover two teachers on maternity leave and a new teacher has recently started to replace a member of staff who is due to retire in the humanities department.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

In spite of the strong momentum for improvement identified at the last monitoring inspection, the capacity of senior leadership and governance has not been sufficient to turn around the rapid decline in students' achievement. Unvalidated data for the school's performance in 2013 indicate that the school does not meet the government's minimum expectations for students' progress and attainment. This is because the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, declined by nine percentage points to 36% overall in 2013. Similarly the proportion of students who made expected progress in both English and mathematics was much lower than national figures. Minutes of governing body meetings show that governors do not challenge senior leaders with sufficient rigour to explain some of the nuances or finer detail of the school's performance data. Governors are, therefore, left unaware of some of the root causes of students' underachievement. At their meetings governors do not explore whether specific groups of students perform less well when compared to their peers. For example, examination results show that the gap between outcomes for students who are eligible for support through the pupil premium funding and students who are not, remain wide and are not closing quickly enough. Governors' evaluation of the impact of the school's use of pupil premium funding, as published on the school's website, has not been updated to reflect the 2013 results. The evaluation as it stands is inaccurate and misleading; it fails to compare correctly the outcomes of students who are eligible for support to the outcomes of students who are not.

The quality of middle leadership remains fragile. Just as senior leaders tackle one problem in a subject area, another unforeseen problem crops up in a different subject area. Senior leaders continue to fire fight and tackle issues reactively rather than proactively. An example of this is seen in the improvement in results in modern languages which had previously been a weakness in the school. However, at the same time results in history and geography plummeted in 2013. This is because there is no systematic monitoring or challenges made by governors to the reviews undertaken by senior leaders in subject departments.

The leadership of teaching has been strengthened. Judgements made by senior leaders about the quality of teaching are now based on a wider range of evidence to help them assess the typicality of teaching over time. In addition to what they see when they observe lessons, senior leaders also take into account the rate of students' progress, the quality of teachers' marking and students' views. Leadership in mathematics has also been strengthened. New staff are supported well and clear plans are in place to manage their performance and ensure that their teaching skills have maximum impact. There is a strong esprit de corps within the department and staff are working collaboratively. This has rubbed off on some of the students who are now more aspirational about studying mathematics in further education.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Students were seen to be much more actively engaged in their learning than was previously the case. This is because teachers managed the tasks and activities to ensure that the lesson moved at a brisk pace which kept students alert and interested. Teachers' skills in helping students move between different types of activity such as whole class, individual and small group have also improved, as seen for example when students moved seamlessly between the varied activities and their progress never faltered.
- Teachers are much better informed about students' levels of prior attainment and whether or not they are making sufficient progress in their learning. The teachers observed and those spoken to put this information to good effect to improve the quality of their planning or the how they construct the feedback they provide to students when they mark their work. Students have noticed this, too. In particular, those in the higher ability band feel that teachers expect more from them and provide more opportunities for them to deepen their knowledge and understanding in lessons. They also feel that teachers now engage with them in more meaningful discussions about their progress and capabilities.
- Students' attendance has improved significantly. Overall attendance is now much closer to the national average and is no longer consistently low. The school has had particular success in tackling students who are persistently absent. In 2013 the rate for persistent absenteeism declined by four percentage points and is moving quickly towards the national average for all schools.
- The proportion of students who made expected progress in mathematics improved slightly from 46% to 54% in 2013. GCSE results in modern languages also improved in line with the school's predictions.

- In 2013 the school successfully reduced the rate of fixed-term exclusion by more than two thirds. Improvements in students' attitudes to learning were also confirmed during visits to lessons. Some teachers explicitly promote good behaviour for learning to good effect in their teaching. For example a mathematics teacher made clear her high expectations at the start of the lesson and alerted students quickly when they started to slouch in their seat or demonstrate any other behaviour that caused their progress to slow down. This positive approach to raising aspirations and improving behaviour does not extend to the lack of challenge by staff to the many boys who denigrate the school's image and their own sense of pride by wearing their uniform in a slovenly way.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Data that relate to students' progress are now more accessible to teachers and are provided in a format that makes it easier for them to plan their teaching more effectively. However some of the school's predictions for students' expected progress and examination results in 2013 were inaccurate which indicates that the teachers' assessments that inform these data are unreliable. Although there is some cross-checking of the marking within departments, this only serves to reinforce the unreliability of the data and that teachers are unable to gauge how their marking compares to that of other schools. This also means that senior leaders and governors are unable to determine whether or not data on students' current levels of performance realistically demonstrate whether actions for improvement are having the impact they should on accelerating students' progress.
- The quality of self-evaluation is weak and does not have enough input from governors. School performance data are not evaluated with sufficient precision to pinpoint where the real problems are so that the root causes of underachievement can be tackled head on. Minutes of the governing body meetings indicate that governors perceive that the inclusion of students with moderate learning difficulties has a negative impact on the school's headline results. This is misleading as disabled students and those with special educational needs are generally served well by the school. The real weakness lies in the performance of students who join the school with the capability of attaining a good grade in their GCSE examinations. The performance of this group of students is having a far more deleterious impact on the school's progress data. White British boys in particular are less likely to attend school regularly and are more likely to be excluded. The significant funds that are allocated to the school to compensate for the high levels of disadvantage experienced by a significant proportion of the students are not used to good effect. In 2013, for example, only 27% of the students supported through the pupil premium funding, compared to 52% of their peers who were not, gained five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics.

External support

The local authority has a clear and accurate view of the school's performance and has valid concerns about the governing body's capacity to secure improvements at the rapid pace that is needed. The local authority has made a significant investment in improving the quality of teaching. This is evident in the renewed confidence amongst teachers and increased levels of consistency in the quality of teaching across the school. However, the local authority has not been sufficiently robust in holding the governing body to account by requiring it to demonstrate value for money of this investment through the impact on improving outcomes for students.

Priorities for further improvement

- The school should commission an external review of governance to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance can be improved quickly.
- An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should also be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may also be improved.
- External checking of teachers' assessments in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 should be undertaken to secure the accuracy and reliability of the data that inform leaders and teachers of the extent of progress.