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Mr John Barnes
Executive Headteacher
Astley Community High School
Elsdon Avenue
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Northumberland
NE25 0BP

Dear Mr Barnes

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Astley Community High School, Northumberland

Following my visit to your school on 28 January 2014, 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 October 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 that the school's development plan continues to focus on the areas for improvement and is regularly and carefully monitored to judge the impact of this work on pupils' progress.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and head of school, four members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school development plan was evaluated, together with documentation relating to the use and impact of pupil premium funding (the pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after by the local authority). I undertook a brief tour of the school with two students to evaluate their views about the school's provision.

Context

There have been a small number of changes to the school's staffing since the inspection. The governors have set up a steering group, which includes a representative of the local authority, to oversee improvement work in the school.

Main findings

The executive headteacher and head of school have responded well to the areas for improvement identified at the recent inspection. Actions in place prior to the inspection have been strengthened and sharpened and the pace of improvement has been accelerated. The school development plan clearly identifies the most important priorities together with a range of strategies for improvement work, challenging but realistic timescales and the success criteria by which they should be measured.

Arrangements to improve how the school tracks the attainment and progress of all pupils and groups of pupils have improved and a much more refined system is now in place. This information can now be used more effectively by teachers to ensure lesson activities match the needs of all pupils, and in particular those supported by pupil premium funding. Plans for the allocation of this additional funding are detailed and the impact of work to support these pupils is being seen both in improved attendance and in performance.

Evidence gathered during this visit demonstrates that the school has made a positive start in meeting the aims of the development plan, and in particular that results in GCSE English will be significantly improved this year. The school's governors are well-informed about its work. Link governors visit the school on a regular basis and the focus and records of the work of governors are now much clearer.

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 and local authority have rapidly brokered a significant range of support from the Cramlington Teaching School Alliance in the areas for improvement identified in the inspection. A National Lead for Education (NLE) has been appointed to support the school leadership team and a Specialist Leader of Education is in place to support the leadership of the English department. The school has appointed additional members to the governors steering group to provide external support and challenge. It is too early to detect the impact of this work.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Families, Adults and Children's Services for Northumberland.

Yours sincerely

David Brown

Her Majesty's Inspector

