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6 February 2014

Mrs Gig Brimelow
Headteacher
Lostock Hall Academy
Todd Lane North
Lostock Hall
Preston
Lancashire
PR5 5UR

Dear Mrs Brimelow

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lostock Hall Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 5 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. 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 academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, the National Leader of Education who is supporting the academy and a representative of the local authority. The academy's improvement plan was evaluated, as was the contract of support between the academy and the National Support School.

Context

The acting headteacher at the time of the recent section 5 inspection was appointed as permanent headteacher in November 2013. A new Chair of the Governing Body was elected in December 2013. The head of modern foreign languages and the second in charge of mathematics have left the academy to take posts elsewhere. Two other teachers have left.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders are acting with urgency to address the weaknesses identified at the section 5 inspection. The inspection report of October 2013 indicated that the academy's leaders had recently established systems to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching. These systems have been strengthened and a shared view of the quality of teaching, focused on its impact on pupil progress, is evident among senior leaders.

The academy's improvement plan is comprehensive and addresses all the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection. It is, however, not sufficiently sharp in terms of identifying in advance the dates when actions are to be taken and there is no precise monitoring calendar that would enable leaders to be clear about expectations term by term. Senior leaders acknowledge that this refinement would make their monitoring more systematic. Leaders are evaluating areas for improvement retrospectively at half termly intervals. Their evaluation is based on wide-ranging data.

The relatively new senior leadership team is a unified body whose individual members possess complementary skills and expertise. The headteacher ensures that leaders work closely together and that channels of communication are open. Senior leaders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities underpinning the shared aim of accelerating students' progress and narrowing the attainment gaps between different groups.

The academy's strategic use of data has been developed effectively so that teachers know which students are in danger of underachieving and can adapt their planning accordingly. Similarly, subject leaders have reliable information that enables them to evaluate the effectiveness of their departments. Leaders responsible for monitoring the progress of year groups are able to plan interventions and governors can now hold senior leaders properly to account.

The academy's data indicate that students' achievement is rising for all groups, although gaps remain too large between boys and girls, and between students supported by the pupil premium and their peers. (The pupil premium is additional funding made available for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after by the local authority and those with parents serving in the armed forces). The academy's leaders analyse performance data thoroughly and regularly. They meet to discuss the progress of individual students and take appropriate action as a result of sharing information about the aids and barriers to their performance. Additional programmes have been introduced to support the literacy skills of identified students eligible for support through the pupil premium. The academy's wide range of classes and clubs after the end of the formal day enable students to benefit from individual or small group support that complements more focused teaching in lessons. The work of pastoral leaders is integral to the academy's approach; monitoring and mentoring are closely linked.

The attendance of students supported by the pupil premium is closely tracked. Their attendance is above the national average and rising, as it is for other groups in the academy.

Senior leaders' work is quality assured by the local authority and by the National Leader of Education who provides support to the academy. Shared lesson observations have been followed by insightful discussions about the next steps to improve teaching. The academy's continuing professional development programme is sufficiently flexible to meet individual needs while emphasising whole-school priorities. The contract of support between the academy and the National Support School spans the next two years and is tailored to meet the academy's needs.

An external review of governance has been undertaken by a National Leader of Governance. Governors have lost no time in responding to its recommendations. Named governors are linked to subject departments and to action plan priorities. Governors have undertaken training and more is planned. Governors are now well equipped to ask challenging

questions. A link has been made with an outstanding school to develop the academy's use and analysis of pupil premium funding; this link involves governors. The governing body has established a standards and effectiveness committee whose remit is to monitor the academy's performance. This committee keeps track of the implementation of the action plan and its meetings are now attended by a local authority School Improvement Officer.

Arrangements for keeping parents informed of the academy's progress are robust. A parents' forum has been established that includes governors.

The support from the local authority has been extensive over recent months. The School Improvement Officer provides detailed reports on the academy's progress against priorities. The support from the National Leader of Education is proportionate to the academy's needs. The academy has forged links with a Teaching School from which it draws some of its support for teachers' professional development. A further link has been established with a local high school where there is expertise in the teaching of humanities. The academy has an extensive support programme in place for the two newly qualified teachers who are in post; this includes moderation by the local authority.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgement was made:

The governing body's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers only in departments where there is proven capacity to support them.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Interim Executive Director for Children & Young People for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector