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Mr David Stanley
Executive Headteacher
The Grange School
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Dear Mr Stanley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Grange School, Halton

Following my visit to your school on 24 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 November 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:

- make clear, in improvement plans, exactly what success is expected and when successes are gained they are recorded clearly.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with the Executive Headteacher; the new all-through leadership team comprising leaders from the primary and secondary phases of the school; six representatives of the Governing Body, including the Chair; fourteen students from the secondary phase; and a representative of the local authority. In these meetings we discussed the action taken since the last inspection. I also evaluated the school's improvement plans and looked at minutes of the Governing Body and records of the monitoring undertaken by leaders since the

inspection of November 2013. I also toured the school and took into account the 43 responses recorded on Parent View.

Context

Since the inspection of November 2013 the all-through leadership team has been expanded in number to include more representatives from the primary phase and provide a stronger focus on students for whom additional government funding is intended to support.

Main findings

Leaders and governors are acting with determination to improve the secondary phase of the school. Both groups have stepped up to the plate well. Early indications are that the capacity of leaders and governors to improve is growing well, increasing their confidence that the secondary phase will be good at its next inspection.

Having undertaken a review of governance prior to the November 2013 inspection, governors have continued to focus sharply on supporting leaders and widening the leadership team. They are holding them to account for the performance of students, particularly those for whom the additional government funding supports. Governors are showing excellent levels of commitment, meeting for example on a weekly basis. In these regular, well attended meetings governors are asking probing questions and ensuring planned improvements stay on track.

The new all-through leadership team is responding very well to this level of challenge and support. The improvement plan is comprehensive, although the intended successes of actions taken are not always identified. The headteacher and his team acted swiftly to bring about important changes within just a few weeks of the inspection. Actions taken include the engagement of an external partner to promote outstanding teaching and the development of a whole school vision to set high expectations of teachers, pupils and students. There is closer working together of staff from both primary and secondary phases so that best ways of working are shared routinely. In addition, there has been an increased focus on improving the quality of teaching. Quite correctly, leaders are not judging teaching quality on lesson observations alone: instead they are looking at the whole picture by linking the findings of their observations with standards of work in students' books and with the information they hold about the progress different groups of students are making.

Leaders' strong focus on the quality of marking and feedback is paying dividends. Students spoken with reported good improvements which have improved their learning. These include receiving more regular feedback about their work and having opportunities to respond to what teachers have written and said. On occasions, though, a few teachers have not followed the new guidelines relating to marking. This has been identified quickly by leaders and swift improvements made. However,

these improvements – important sources of evidence demonstrating success – have not always been recorded.

Students who spoke with me were most complimentary about their leaders, all saying they knew the headteacher and his team want everyone to do their best. Other improvements students have identified since November 2013 include having larger workbooks which help them to take pride in their work and revise more effectively and increased levels of challenge and expectation from their teachers.

External support

The local authority has a good overview of the school. It is right to say there has been a 'sea change' in leadership and governance. Its support and challenge for the school reflects its confidence in leaders', including governors', abilities to build on the best practice found in the school, particularly that in the primary phase. This confidence is well placed.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector