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Mr David Waugh
Headteacher
Poynton High School and Performing Arts College
Yew Tree Lane
Poynton
Stockport
Cheshire
SK12 1PU

Dear Mr Waugh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Poynton High School and Performing Arts College, Cheshire East

Following my visit to your school on 14 May 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 January 2014. 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:

- extend the current Rapid Improvement Plan to drive the improvement of the school over next year and further into the future
- ensure that the recommendations from the external reviews of the pupil premium, the support for students with special educational needs and governance continue to be securely and robustly implemented
- ensure that consistent approaches to improved teaching and learning, including marking, are fully embedded.

Evidence

Meetings were held with you, senior leaders, students, the Chair of Governors and three other governors, and a representative of the local authority. Documents, including post-inspection action plans prepared by the school, minutes of meetings of the Governing Body, records of work completed with external partners and school information about students' achievement were evaluated. Samples of students' work from Years 7 to 11 were reviewed. A tour to see the school at work was undertaken, accompanied two senior leaders.

Context

The Chair of Governors has stepped down and an interim Chair of Governors appointed. The Governing Body is being reconstituted. The senior leadership team has been restructured and two deputy headteachers appointed. A restructuring of support staff roles is taking place. New subject leaders for science and modern foreign languages, a new co-ordinator for special educational needs and leaders of new teams with responsibility for community and welfare have been appointed. Three middle leaders have resigned.

Main findings

Senior leaders, staff and governors responded immediately to the findings of the recent inspection by increasing the scale and pace of improvement in the school. They have re-focussed their determination to ensure the school offers students the best possible education. An openness to accept the changes needed is widely shared. Alterations to the organisation of senior and middle leadership, governance and special educational needs provision have already been made. Roles are now clearer and these better match the needs of the school.

Senior leaders prepared a 'Rapid Improvement Plan' to ensure that changes over the rest of this year were properly thought out and well organised. This plan details priorities, staged targets for improvement, staff responsibilities for actions and governors' checks on the planned improvements. Much has already been accomplished, for example, in improvement to science. Senior leaders and governors must now ensure momentum and positive staff commitment are maintained by extending the plan to become a manageable, longer term improvement plan.

The external review of the school's use of the pupil premium¹ has been completed. The school is sharing in joint review and development with other schools. Gaps

The pupil premium is specific, additional funding provided to support the education of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, pupils who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years and children who have been looked after continuously for a period of 6 months.

between the achievement of students supported by the pupil premium and others have started to decrease. Systems to track the progress of students eligible for the pupil premium have been improved. Current indications are that the progress of students with this support is increasing more rapidly than that of others.

Teaching and learning are getting better. Senior leaders are ensuring that teachers are more aware of effective approaches and good ideas are shared more widely. Weekly staff briefings now include discussion of aspects of teaching and learning. A new approach to improve marking is being trialled. This requires students to respond to comments made by teachers. While this approach is making a good contribution to some students' learning, even as a trial, its use is neither consistent nor widespread.

The arrangements to support students with special educational needs are starting to improve. Senior leaders commissioned an external review and have begun to implement its recommendations. Further work is being done with a Specialist Leader of Education from another school and a local authority officer. A new co-ordinator has been appointed. Steps have been taken to ensure continuity of leadership as the new co-ordinator fully takes on her role. An audit of the skills of learning support assistants has been completed. They are now deployed to work more closely in particular subject areas and better included in training for all staff. The register of students with special educational needs has been reviewed and a new system to track their progress introduced. This has already led to faster progress, for example, one student's learning was re-planned once the teacher identified barriers stopping him from making progress.

Senior and middle leaders' skills are being developed in a systematic way. There is a renewed commitment to leadership training. External partners are being used to give leaders a wider perspective where this will help the school. Senior leaders know that, over time, this support should be phased out.

The external review of governance recommended in the inspection report is still to take place. This will be completed after the Governing Body has been reconstituted. Support is being provided by two National Leaders of Governance over this process. Governors already understand their strategic role better and are asking more challenging questions of senior leaders. The interim chair and other governors demonstrate a determination to improve governance further.

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

Local authority officers are providing good support and effective challenge to school leaders. Local authority advice is clear while also requiring school leaders to take their own decisions. Senior leaders have sought support from other partners where

this will lead to faster improvement. This has included work with leaders from a number of effective schools through the Fallibroome, Kyra and Red Kite teaching schools alliances and with the headteacher of Middleton Technology School, who is a National Leader of Education.

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

Yours sincerely

David Selby

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- The Education Funding Agency (EFA)