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Mrs Carol Cawkwell
Headteacher
The Hathershaw College
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Oldham
Greater Manchester
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Dear Mrs Cawkwell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Hathershaw College, Oldham

Following my visit to your academy on 2 June 2014 accompanied by Eileen Mulgrew, Senior Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 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 academy should take further action to ensure that:

- the rapid improvement needed for the academy to be judged good at its next inspection continues by extending the post-Ofsted action plan to include the next school year; linking it to a rigorous evaluation of progress made so far; sharpening the precision of the targets for the achievement of different groups of students; and, making governors' role in checking the effectiveness of actions taken explicit
- the new approach to marking enables teachers to provide comments with appropriate detail so that students can improve their work.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings to discuss the action taken since the last inspection were held with you, senior leaders responsible for raising achievement and the quality of teaching, the special educational needs co-ordinator, the Hearing Resource Centre leader, two groups of students and three governors including the Chair of the Governing Body. A phone call took place with a consultant who works with the academy to monitor and evaluate the quality of its work. The post Ofsted action plan was evaluated. A tour of the academy took place accompanied by you.

Context

The Principal will retire at the end of this school year. A vice-principal has been appointed to be acting Principal and an additional vice-principal appointed for the next school year. Since the recent inspection, three teachers have left the academy and been replaced. The roles of staff supporting students with disabilities or special educational needs have been re-organised. A data manager with responsibility for information on students' progress has been appointed. Teachers responsible for the supporting the achievement of different groups of students have been appointed.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors acted swiftly in response to the inspection findings. Senior leaders have written a post-Ofsted action plan. Systematic action is being taken to improve teaching. This is leading to improvement. While the plan has given impetus to the current improvement, the plan now needs to be extended past the end of this school year. In order to increase its effectiveness further, senior leaders and governors should also ensure that: it links more clearly to the academy's formal self-evaluation document; precise targets are included which refer to all important groups of students; and, governors' role in checking the impact of actions is specified.

Teaching is improving. Training is in place to help all teachers to improve their practice. The academy's evaluation of teaching indicates that the training has generally led to improvement. Where this is not the case, further individualised support and challenge takes place. Where teachers have not met the standard expected senior leaders have taken further action. A teaching improvement group has been formed. This allows teachers of different experience to discuss and gain confidence to implement new approaches.

Improvements to the support of students with disabilities or special educational needs which started before the inspection have continued. All learning support assistants have taken part in extended training appropriate to their needs and responsibilities. Senior leaders report that learning support assistants are having more impact on learning and that the achievement of the students supported is getting better. Teachers have very recently been appointed to check that teachers

understand how best to meet the needs of the least able and the most able in lessons. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these new roles.

Marking is improving. It is used to challenge students to think about work they have completed and 'make it better'. Time is allocated in lessons for students to respond. Students say that teachers are expecting more. While improved marking is leading to better learning, some teachers are writing at such length in books that this new approach lacks sustainability.

Senior leaders have shifted their scrutiny of students' achievement from their final attainment to the progress they make over time. A second data manager has been appointed so that better information on students' progress is available. This is used in weekly meetings where senior and middle leaders consider students' progress in English and mathematics. If any student is falling behind, additional teaching is offered. School data indicates that while achievement has started to increase, some pockets of underachievement remain, for example, for most able students in mathematics.

Leadership is improving. A reviewed performance management policy for teachers is being introduced. There are higher expectations of the progress students should make as a result of the work of individual teachers. Senior leaders' evaluation of teachers' effectiveness is being widened to give a longer term view of teachers' effectiveness. For example, by looking at the progress students demonstrate through the work in their exercise books.

Appropriate arrangements have been made to ensure that the pace of improvement of the academy does not slow when the current Principal retires. Governors are aware of the importance of careful induction procedures for senior leaders new to their posts.

Governors are providing effective support and increasingly clear challenge to academy leaders. For example, a monitoring group which includes senior leaders and governors meets monthly to check that rapid improvement is continuing. The reviews of governance and the academy's use of the pupil premium recommended after the inspection have been organised. Once they are completed, members plan to reorganise roles, responsibilities and procedures to strengthen governance in holding senior leaders to account.

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

External support

The academy has little involvement with the local authority. Senior leaders work with external consultants to support the academy's improvement. The consultants have provided bespoke training for teachers. A National College for Teaching and

Leadership programme to improve middle leadership is to be put in place over the next year. The academy is linking with a local Teaching School at Ashton on Mersey to further support teachers to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector