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3 July 2014

Mrs Pat Russell
Principal
Pensby High School for Boys: A Specialist Sports College
Irby Road
Heswall
Wirral
Merseyside
CH61 6XN

Dear Mrs Russell

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Pensby High School for Boys: A Specialist Sports College

Following my visit to your school on 1 and 2 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 school's most recent monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged as having serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in April to May 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation. It is my recommendation that the next inspection be a full section 5 re-inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Director of Children's Services for Wirral.

Yours sincerely

Ian Richardson

Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2013

- Improve the overall quality of teaching, particularly in English and science, so that all students make good or better progress by:
 - sharing existing good and outstanding practice more effectively
 - making sure all teachers plan lessons with activities that stimulate and engage learners, especially those who are capable of achieving the highest levels or grades
 - checking that all teachers are using the school marking policy effectively so that students get clear information on how to improve their work and that students are encouraged to respond to teachers' comments.
- Raise achievement in English and science by: strengthening the quality of leadership in these subjects:
 - regularly checking on students' progress in these subjects to make sure targets are being met and taking swift and effective action if they are not.
- Improve students' reading and writing skills by:
 - rigorously applying the whole-school literacy policy so that students know exactly what they need to do to improve their reading and writing.
- Ensure students make good progress in all subjects in the sixth form by:
 - improving attendance
 - setting individual targets for students that will help them to aim high and make at least good progress making sure that new monitoring procedures result in rapid and sustained improvement in the quality of teaching in the sixth form.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 July 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with senior leaders, a group of four middle leaders and a group of three teachers. In addition, he held interviews with three groups of students from Year 7, 10 and 12. The inspector met with the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor and, in a separate meeting, held discussions with the local authority's senior manager for school improvement. The inspector checked the single central record, which records employment suitability checks carried out by the school, and carried out a series of short observations of lessons to look at students' attitudes to learning. He also carried out a work scrutiny to identify the quality of marking and feedback to students. The focus for the inspection was the points for improvement on the Ofsted report from April to May 2013.

Context

There have been no changes in the senior leadership team and only one member of teaching staff has left the school since the previous monitoring inspection. There have been changes of role among middle leaders in the school and appointments made for lead practitioners in mathematics and English.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders continue to lead change effectively through adherence to the improvement plan created after the inspection in May 2013. Having settled on systems that bring about a consistent view of progress, they are implemented very effectively and the outcome measures are well communicated to staff. Interviews with middle leaders and other teachers show that the culture of rigorous monitoring now permeates all levels of staff in the school. Staff spoke positively of the appointment of a data manager whose work underpins the implementation of monitoring by senior leaders and middle leaders. In interview, middle leaders described how much they are helped, yet held to account, by the half-termly publication of data dashboards for all classes in Key Stage 4 and for all subjects.

These data dashboards compare performance against targets and form the basis of accountability meetings that follow each of the monitoring points for which dashboards are produced. The accountability meetings are thorough and challenging. They are attended by the Principal, senior leader line-manager, area team or subject leader and a governor, either the Chair or the link governor. In the sixth form, performance is interrogated by using A level, AS level and BTEC Level 3 value added reports. These value added reports serve the same purpose as the data dashboards. At these points area leaders are challenged to describe what they are doing about any area of underperformance and what impact they are having. Each teacher now has a data dashboard for each class they teach and they are required to discuss the performance with the area team leader or subject leader. More robust tracking of Key Stage 3 performance is being developed.

Another main focus of the improvement continues to be the improvement of teaching and learning. This is being brought about by a range of initiatives. A pedagogy group made up of voluntary teacher members continues to meet monthly. Faculty leaders have carried out joint lesson observations with senior leaders and this has promoted the identification of outstanding teaching. Teachers whose teaching is judged to require improvement are helped to improve by an assistant headteacher and the teaching and learning coordinator. Within faculties, stronger teachers are paired with those whose teaching is not yet outstanding to bring about improvement. Governors have recognised that students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are better as a result of improvements in teaching.

Training for the whole staff has focused on engagement, challenge, differentiation and marking. Over the last year there have been frequent marking reviews. Marking has been checked as part of all work scrutinies and lesson observations. As a consequence of work scrutiny carried out by senior leaders, all staff have received feedback and heads of subject and area team leaders have been given feedback to enable them to hold individual staff to account. Staff are now marking more often and regularly. Students describe marking and the feedback they receive from teachers as good or outstanding.

Leadership of subject areas has been strengthened and made more accountable. Area team leaders have been given training opportunities relevant to their role and feel well supported by allocated senior leaders as their line managers. To quote one curriculum leader 'We now have the tools to do the job'. An executive head of science has been appointed, and posts of responsibility in science are being reviewed in September 2014 having been set specific targets for improvement in standards of teaching and learning. A teaching and learning specialist has been appointed in science. A new head of English has been appointed for September and a lead practitioner for English has been appointed. In mathematics, a lead practitioner has been appointed.

The governing body has brought about improvements in its own practice. Governors participate in the half-termly monitoring meetings and the way they consider data have become more forensic. They support the way monitoring of performance is carried out across the year groups. They recognise the move to using data that are realistic and comment, for example, how the use of A level, AS level and BTEC Level 3 value added reports in the sixth form has raised teachers' and students' aspirations. The governing body expresses approval of the changes in staffing and such appointments as those of lead practitioners in English and mathematics. The link governor system has been strengthened and their attendance at monitoring meetings is seen as improving the challenge they can offer to the school. The governing body endorses also the sharper focus on improving behaviour and a greater intolerance of poor behaviour. The governing body is more confident in its role of support and challenge.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- During the last year there have been local authority led monitoring events and reports on science, English, literacy and mathematics in collaboration with the school's senior leaders. In addition, science has received a monitoring review led by the senior leaders.
- In English, students' performance at the latest monitoring point against the expected grades has shown significant increases. Current tracking data show Key Stage 3 students to be on target or to be making good progress in English and mathematics.
- The good rigour of data collection has been matched by the analysis and display of performance data, such as in the progress charts. It is now possible to track in detail the performance of individual students.
- Self-evaluation procedures are thorough and encompass the wide range of relevant data. The senior leaders' self-assessment grades are cautious and acknowledge that the predicted upturn in performance needs to be confirmed by the outcomes of national examinations.
- In the sixth form, the performance data gathered at recent monitoring points show an improvement on the outcomes from 2013. This is true of A level and of BTEC where the proportion of distinction grades has increased and there are fewer pass grades with no fails expected.
- Senior leaders' lesson observations show an increased proportion of good or better lessons in the sixth form. Throughout the year so far, 66% of the teaching has been observed to be good or better. Many sixth form teachers have been involved in training to improve teaching and learning.
- Attendance in the sixth form has risen significantly since the inspection and now stands at around 92% for Year 12 during the period September 2013 to June 2014. The registration system is now improved to overcome some of the inaccuracies previously experienced.
- The local authority has contributed to improvements in literacy by funding the appointment of a literacy lead teacher. This appointment has been extended to a second year because of the positive impact it is having.

- The local authority carried out a review of literacy across the curriculum. It reported clear systems and processes having been established. Literacy support posters are displayed in all classrooms and the lead literacy teacher is coaching teachers to develop their capacity in literacy.
- In interview, students described little in the school as less than good. They expressed most disappointment in the behaviour of some students, although they made it clear it was confined to a minority.
- Students were able to describe improvements in the school since the inspection. These include improved behaviour and better changeover between lessons, which have improved punctuality.

External support

The local authority continues to work closely with the senior leaders in the school. It has funded the appointment of a lead literacy teacher and will fund the post into a second year because of the positive impact it is having. The local authority has funded training for improvement of teaching and learning and training for the use and analysis of A level, AS level and BTEC Level 3 value added reports for the sixth form. Its officers have continued to support the school through holding school causing concern meetings on a half-termly basis. Officers of the local authority have contributed to reviewing the school's action plan and rating the progress made against it. They have led subject reviews in collaboration with senior leaders in science, English, mathematics and literacy. The local authority's senior manager in school improvement recognises the significant improvement in the school's analysis and use of data in holding middle leaders and teachers to account. The school collaborates with other schools in the area and has used external consultants in a range of ways, mainly focused on improving teaching and learning.