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10 July 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 with Judith Tolley, Additional Inspector, and Denis Oliver, Associate Inspector, to your academy on 8 and 9 July 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. The academy may appoint newly qualified teachers in those subjects where leadership is securing strong improvement and where there is good practice in mentoring and supporting teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good, in order to strongly improve students' achievement, especially in English, and particularly of boys and students supported by the pupil premium, by:
 - sharing existing good practice so that all teachers have high expectations for their students and know what a really good lesson looks like
 - teachers using assessment information when planning lessons and adjusting their teaching accordingly so that all students are challenged and make at least good progress
 - developing highly effective programmes across all subjects to promote students' basic skills in numeracy, but more so in their literacy
 - reviewing schemes of work, particularly in Key Stage 3, to make sure that lesson plans build on prior learning more effectively
 - ensuring that all teachers mark students' work thoroughly, with clear guidance on how to improve, giving students the opportunity to respond to their advice.

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - firmly embedding recently established systems to improve the school, particularly in the quality and effectiveness of teaching, and rigorously monitoring the impact of new initiatives on school improvement
 - designing an effective and sharply focused development plan that provides clear direction as to how the school can rapidly become much better. This plan should have distinct milestones and success criteria, so that the school can regularly review its progress at timely intervals
 - undertaking an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the academy's use of pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, groups of students, four parents representing the Parents' Forum, the Chair of the Governing Body and six other governors, a representative from the local authority and the National Leader of Education who is supporting the academy. They observed parts of 18 lessons, five of which were joint observations with the academy's senior leaders. They considered the academy's self-evaluation document, minutes of governing body minutes, monitoring records and information relating to the progress of students currently attending the academy. Inspectors looked at a selection of students' work from different subjects alongside two members of the senior leadership team.

Context

Since the monitoring inspection that took place in February 2014, a science teacher has left and a new science teacher has been appointed. A new mathematics teacher took up post in April 2014. Four new appointments were made to the governing body following the first monitoring visit. One community governor has recently resigned and a parent governor's term of office has ended; the process of appointing new governors to replace them is underway.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' achievement is improving. The academy's tracking of students' progress indicates that attainment at GCSE level is set to rise in 2014 and students' progress is much closer to that found nationally. There are clear indications that the progress of students in other year groups is accelerating; this is because of a relentless focus on assessing students' achievements regularly and rigorously, adapting teaching and providing additional interventions for students identified as underachieving. Programmes have been implemented to support the literacy skills of identified students, including those eligible for support through the pupil premium. There are indications that these are beginning to show success in raising students' reading ages; there are plans to roll successful programmes out further. Gaps in achievement between students supported by the pupil premium and their peers are beginning to close but remain a priority for the academy. Girls' achievement outstrips that of boys. The academy's leaders and governors are taking action to improve boys' performance without detriment to that of girls. Lesson observations found that teachers are well aware of students' achievement profiles and are increasingly taking these into account in planning their lessons, however there is not always sufficient evidence of work being appropriately tailored to some students' needs, especially for higher-attainers, and consequently their potential is not consistently realised.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved since the academy's section 5 inspection as a result of the academy's leaders setting out clear expectations, supporting teachers' professional development, monitoring the implementation of school policies, beginning to share good practice and robustly challenging under-performance. The school's evaluation of the quality of teaching is based on triangulated evidence from direct lesson observations, scrutiny of students' progress over time and reviews of work in their books.

The academy's tracking of students' progress is comprehensive and teachers now have reliable data to enable them to plan for students to make progress. Planning is generally good, often including key questions for students to answer. There are some occasions when higher-attaining students are not challenged as fully as they might be, such as when teachers do not expect them to give full answers to questions, or to hypothesise and speculate.

Excellent relationships between teachers and students characterise many lessons, increasingly complemented by more challenging, relevant work that fosters students' literacy skills. In English, teachers are particularly effective in developing students' vocabulary. Year 9 students successfully established a hierarchy of adjectives to describe *Lady Macbeth*, because their teacher encouraged a willingness to explore language. Classroom displays typically include some of the key subject-specific language that students may need and there are some eye-catching displays of students' work. These have not been extended to become fully effective as prompts for learning or celebrations of students' achievements.

Students enjoy the opportunities they are given to work independently and collaboratively. A powerful example was seen in a Year 9 music lesson in which students' enjoyment of preparation for their end of term presentation was palpable. In some lessons, however, students are not invited to think deeply enough or build on each other's ideas and their progress slows as a result.

There has been a strong focus in the academy on improving the quality of marking. Students spoke enthusiastically to inspectors about the recently developed 'STAR' marking system whereby teachers provide 'strength, target, action and reward when marking students' work, and students themselves are required to 'review and respond'. There is already convincing evidence of students making faster progress in response to a dialogue with teachers focused on the strengths and weaknesses in their work, particularly in English. The marking of a teacher in the English department is being used by an examination board to exemplify good practice.

Students who spoke with inspectors confirmed that homework is now being set more regularly. Whereas some are happy that homework is pitched at the right level,

others think that it is not always directly related to their learning and question whether there is equity in the amounts of homework received by students with different attainment levels. School leaders acknowledge this issue and are undertaking a further review of homework.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour was judged to be good at the academy's most recent section 5 inspection and continues to be a strength. Students show impressive loyalty and commitment to the academy; they are proud to be members of Lostock Hall and enjoy their responsibilities in making it a happy, thriving community. This was exemplified by the roles taken by students to ensure that sports day was a success and the zeal with which reading mentors support other students. Attendance has continued to improve and is above the national average. Exclusions are rare.

Students' attitudes to learning are positive. They willingly help each other in lessons and are keen to find things out for themselves, as was observed in the best teaching in science and mathematics when teachers withheld answers to encourage students to research or question friends as to the most effective ways of learning.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher, senior leaders and staff are passionate about the academy and determined to ensure that it makes rapid progress. Morale is high and there is a strong sense of teamwork. Senior leaders are increasingly outward-facing: researching good practice in other schools, adapting it to meet their needs and monitoring its impact with objective rigour. The academy's data management is an emerging strength: data is regularly collected, well presented and systematically analysed. It enables the clear integration between academic and pastoral systems that guard against students 'falling through the net'. Parents who met with an inspector affirmed their support for the academy and its leadership: they have recognised its recent improvements but also testify to the friendly, supportive ethos of the academy being maintained. The wide range of extra-curricular activities, trips and special events has continued alongside an intense focus on developing systems to accelerate progress and drive up standards rapidly.

The academy is working hard to narrow the gap in attainment between students eligible for support through the pupil premium funding and their peers. Its work is multi-faceted and student-centred. The pastoral team is effective in helping to remove barriers to learning, promoting good attendance, and orchestrating support for individuals. Models of effective practice in narrowing gaps have been researched and there is a strong awareness among teachers that every student's achievement counts.

Subject leaders, including those new to their posts, are good role models as teachers. They are enthusiastic about their work but have not yet been able to ensure that there is consistently good practice in their departments, including in the

standard of marking and the level of challenge for higher-attainers. Leaders' scrutiny of lessons and of students' work is undertaken regularly. Leaders monitor teachers' compliance in following the academy's marking policy but have yet to thoroughly consider the impact of improved feedback on students' progress. Academy leaders know who the strongest teachers are, but more needs to be done to learn from their good practice. Fully developing and embedding the skills of middle leaders is the next key challenge for the academy.

Governance has been strengthened. Governors have responded positively to the external review they commissioned and have developed their roles rapidly. They receive clear, precise and timely information from the headteacher, which they question assiduously. Through their individual links with subjects and areas of the academy's work, the governors have a secure understanding of its life. They provide the academy's leaders with effective support, including in accompanying them on good practice visits to other schools. Governors are not afraid to ask difficult questions and now have the information, training and skills to enable them to do this confidently. The depth of their probing is a key factor in galvanising the academy's improvement. Governors have a clear understanding of the challenges the academy faces and have developed appropriate plans to ensure that it provides best value for money.

External support

The principal source of support to the academy is a National Leader in Education who is the headteacher of a nearby National Support School. He has moderated leaders' evaluations of teaching and supported the development of rigorous monitoring. His support, and that of his senior leaders and staff, has been well received as it is sensitive to the academy's context and recognises Lostock Hall's strengths as well as its areas for development. Consequently, the good practice evident at the academy is being shared and its leaders and teachers are benefiting from links with other schools. A local authority officer continues to support the senior leadership team and the standards and effectiveness committee of the governing body. The support provided to the academy is proportionate and well judged, and is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching, leading to better achievement.