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Mr John Shannon
Headteacher
Heysham High School Sports College
Limes Avenue
Morecambe
Lancashire
LA3 1HS

Dear Mr Shannon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heysham High School Sports College, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 14 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 April 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:

- improve the learning environment within classrooms so that students' work is celebrated and used as a prompt to support their learning.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors, an associate governor, groups of students and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I toured the school with one of the senior leaders and made brief visits to some lessons. The school improvement plan was evaluated and other documents were considered including teachers' planning of

learning, the new student progress log, and data showing the achievement of students currently in the school.

Context

Seven teachers have resigned their posts since the section 5 inspection which judged the school to require improvement and nine new staff have been recruited for September 2014, several of whom have started to work at the school ahead of this date. A restructure of staff roles and responsibilities has been undertaken. A leader has been appointed on a temporary basis with a specific brief to raise the achievement of students eligible for support through the pupil premium.

Main findings

The section 5 inspection reported that you have invigorated the school in your first year in post, raised staff morale and created a culture focused on maximising the achievements of all students. During this monitoring inspection, senior and middle leaders, governors and students were keen to emphasise how quickly the school is moving on various fronts to become good. As one student explained convincingly, change is about hearts and minds and 'can't be just done to people.' You have won over the school community; optimism and vibrancy now characterise Heysham High.

Since the inspection, you have continued to implement the improvement plan that was recognised at the section 5 inspection as being clear and coherent. You identify areas for improvement in meticulous detail, implement improvements carefully and hold staff to account through a rigorous process of quality assurance underpinned by a strong framework of accountability. There are numerous indicators of the resurgence of the school; the remodelling of the school building, including the sixth form centre, from within budget savings is making a positive difference to the learning environment. The introduction of a new school uniform, substantial increase in library books and better computer provision are all contributing to a sense of pride and a belief among students and staff that they are valued.

Your work on improving the quality of learning is tireless, exemplified by a new mantra: 'Our students will recognise that with courage, determination, scholarship and compassion, anything is possible'. There is evidence that this raised expectation of all is beginning to have an impact on achievement; the school's tracking data shows that students' progress is accelerating. The school's predictions are for achievement in 2014 to be more favourably aligned to national figures in English and mathematics. You clearly stated your expectations of teachers when you took up post and this direction has been welcomed. The monitoring you and your senior team have undertaken indicates rising professional standards. You recognise that there is still some way to go in ensuring that the best practice is consistently embedded in all practice within and across departments, for instance in the quality of marking and in the use of high quality display of pupils' work.

The work of the 'outstanding and beyond' group of teachers that researches and pilots approaches to teaching and learning is viewed very positively by colleagues. There is a willingness to share good practice and developments such as the 'Little book of literacy' illustrate a strong drive for pragmatic solutions.

Alongside improving quality class teaching you have also invested in interventions to support students in danger of underachieving, particularly in reading and mathematics. Early data indicate that these are starting to have a positive impact and gaps in attainment are beginning to close.

The school curriculum has been adapted to meet students' needs better and provide them with appropriate introductions to subjects prior to the option process so that they can make informed choices. There is clear promotion of the English Baccalaureate alongside provision of vocational options. Students are particularly enthusiastic about moving up year groups and starting new topics in July so that there is a 'better focus on learning' and an avoidance of the lethargy that sometimes accompanied the end of summer term in the past.

Expectations in the sixth form have been raised through an insistence that qualifications count. The same expectations that appertain in the whole school have been extended to the sixth form. The ongoing work on the improvement to buildings and facilities is appreciated by students and staff who feel that a more professional environment is being created.

The appointment of a national expert in pupil premium means that the school is well placed to benefit from cutting edge approaches and to contribute its own work to national debate. Characteristic of the school is its willingness to seek and build on good practice; the thirst for learning that leaders hope to inculcate in students is evident in their own outward-facing approach as a leadership team.

Students who I spoke with felt that behaviour was improving around the school as a result of more consistent expectations. Much is being done to tackle attendance, which continues to be low overall.

Governance has been strengthened through a restructuring of committees so that communication, decision-making and time management are rationalised. A governor has been given the specific brief of overseeing the spending and impact of pupil premium. Governors have a clear view of the school's priorities and the strategies you are pursuing to secure improvement.

External support

The principal support for the school is through the headteacher of a Lancashire school that is judged to be outstanding who has been nominated as your adviser. He has given specific advice on making improvements to the sixth form through raising

aspirations, attendance and retention. He has also brokered the support of the local authority behaviour consultant who has completed an audit of the school's arrangements to promote good behaviour and attendance. The school is acting upon the recommendations of both these colleagues. You have sought external advice yourselves from high-performing schools, professional associations and the Department for Education on a range of issues from curriculum reorganisation to the nuances of pupil progress data. Your constant seeking of different models against which to judge and amend your own practice is indicative of your focused drive for improvement. Governors have been supported in reviewing their practice by a consultant who was formerly a National Leader in Education. The emerging work of governors will be quality assured by the local authority adviser and through the process of accreditation for the Governors' Quality Mark.

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

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector