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Post-inspection note of visit letter – schools requiring improvement monitoring inspection visits

30 September 2014

Mr Eamonn Murphy
Headteacher
Astley Sports College and Community High School
Yew Tree Lane
Dukinfield
Tameside
SK16 5BL

Dear Mr Murphy

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Astley Sports College and Community High School, Tameside

Following my visit to your school on 29 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and three other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and two groups of students. I evaluated the school action plan and scrutinised other key documentation. I also had the opportunity to accompany you on a tour of the school.

Main findings

Your detailed action plan focuses closely on the areas for improvement identified in the recent report and provides a clear route map to achieving a good judgement at the next inspection. Despite already achieving a good judgement for behaviour and safety, your plan also includes a section on developing outstanding attitudes to

learning in all lessons. This demonstrates the high expectations and aspirations which you have for all students at Astley.

Students look smart in their uniforms and there is a calm atmosphere around the school. When I visited classrooms, I could see that students were engaged in their learning and benefiting from positive relationships with their teachers. A continued reduction in the number of yellow and red cards issued to students and internal exclusions, alongside an improving trend in attendance and reducing persistent absence figures, reflects the strong leadership in this area. Those students I met spoke positively about the improvements in behaviour and the impact this is having on their learning. However, there is no room for complacency here. There is some evidence that a minority of teachers are not following the behaviour policy and two Year 7 students said that their learning is disrupted in some lessons.

Monitoring records show that students throughout the school are benefiting from more good teaching. Individual coaching plans are in place for the small number of staff whose teaching still requires improvement. Teaching trios have been established in order to share good practice more effectively. Tailored support is being provided for the six newly qualified teachers who started in September.

New marking and presentation policies have been introduced. These clear and simple systems are visible around the school and a scrutiny of students' books revealed that they are making a difference to the quality of their work. However, a minority of staff are not adhering to these policies. Not every teacher is picking up poor presentation or when follow-up and extension work has not been completed. The book scrutiny also raised some concerns about whether the more able are being stretched in the work they are covering, particularly in Key Stage 3. Some Year 7 students felt that what they were doing in English was merely re-capping what they had done in primary school. One boy actually felt that the grammar work was less challenging than primary school.

While the GCSE results in the summer brought some cause for celebration, particularly in English and mathematics, you are aware that there are still several areas of concern in other subject areas. You are also aware that the more able are a key focus group for the coming year. Recognising that last year some teacher predictions were not secure, you have introduced a more robust system for collecting data from teachers about the progress and attainment of their students. It is too early in the year to see any impact of this but you know that effective leadership across the school in this area is absolutely vital.

You and your senior leaders are highly visible throughout the school at all times of the day. This was commented upon by the students and they appreciate this. The simple messages which you communicate, frequently and clearly, to all staff and students have made a real difference to the ethos of the school. A new slimmed-down senior leadership team means there is now clarity of roles and clear lines of accountability which is enabling you to hold subject leaders to account more

effectively. However, this has not yet totally eradicated inconsistencies in the way all staff are adhering to school policies.

The new Chair of Governors knows the school very well and the challenges it faces in order to be judged good at its next inspection. He has high aspirations for the school, and to this end, has worked closely with the local authority, to strengthen the governing body further. The new members bring relevant expertise and skills which means the governing body has the required capacity to continue to challenge leaders across the school.

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:

- ensure that all staff are challenging the most able students, particularly in Key Stage 3, in order for them to make the best possible progress
- ensure that all staff are consistently following the presentation, marking and behaviour policies.

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

The local authority knows this school well and the link officer has supported and challenged leaders effectively over recent months, which you and the Chair of Governors value enormously. The impact of this can be seen most significantly in the improved behaviour systems and the effectiveness of governors. He is also providing coaching for a subject leader. While acknowledging the improvements you have made, the local authority officer knows his role is to ensure these efforts continue. To this end, the local authority is carrying out a full review next month.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne

Her Majesty's Inspector