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Mr Ian Evans
Headteacher
Highfield Humanities College
Highfield Road
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Lancashire
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Dear Mr Evans

Special measures monitoring inspection of Highfield Humanities College

Following my visit to your school on 13 January 2015, 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 school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair and five members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. A telephone conversation was conducted with the School Improvement Partner. A learning walk of the school, involving brief visits to lessons, was undertaken with the headteacher. Individual students were spoken to regarding behaviour and their progress in lessons. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

A long serving deputy headteacher retired in December 2014. There have been no other substantive changes to key staff or the school's status since the section 5 inspection in October 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The local authority's statement of action and the school improvement plans are focused on the areas of improvement identified at the last inspection. However, the plans require modification so that key milestones are established by which the impact of actions can be measured and checked against targets to ascertain ongoing progress. This will provide school leaders with the necessary periodic opportunities to reflect upon and evaluate the progress made and, where progress is not accelerating as expected, to take the necessary measure to ensure that it does. Reports on ongoing progress should be shared with governors.

Governors have continued to refine and sharpen their monitoring of school performance. An external review of governance and the use of the pupil premium (additional government money) are due to take place in the third and fourth weeks of January 2015 respectively. Governors have an accurate view of school performance and the ways and means by which senior leaders and staff are seeking to improve that performance.

Senior leaders have a firm focus on improvement and have an increasingly good grasp of their roles and responsibilities in bringing it about. Regular learning walks by senior leaders are conducted to check on progress in learning and behaviour. Staff professional development is focused on the ways and means to improve teaching and learning and the aspirational culture of the school. However, further work is required to develop the leadership skills of middle leaders so as to ensure continuity in the application of the improvement agenda across all areas of the school. School leaders acknowledge that the pace of change to enable accelerated improvement needs to be quickened.

Students generally behave in an orderly manner around the buildings and in classrooms. However, the learning walk undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), as well as discussions with senior leaders and students, offered evidence that some students continue to have a negative attitude to learning. Several students commented to the inspector about the negative impact of low-level disruption on their lessons and the progress that they were making. Senior leaders acknowledge that more work needs to be undertaken to improve and embed consistently high teacher expectations of student behaviour, as well as developing more positive student attitudes to learning. Some positive and challenging engagement in learning was observed and this now needs to be built upon and spread more rapidly across the school.

Current school data indicates that there has been a reduction in student referrals and exclusions. A comprehensive survey of students' views of bullying has been undertaken and has informed the refinement of the anti-bullying strategy. Student surveys suggest that students have a growing confidence that when incidents of bullying occur, they are dealt with quickly. Changes to the school's behaviour policy and expectations are being shared with staff, students and parents. School leaders are placing a stronger focus on mediation, restorative work and student and parental engagement when behavioural issues are identified. Student anti-bullying ambassadors have been appointed.

School leaders recognise that much remains to be done to ensure consistency in the quality of teaching and learning so that all students are making at least expected progress and many are doing better. A greater sense of expectation, ambition and commitment needs to be conveyed to and embraced by staff and students. HMI has recommended that school leaders explore ways to involve students better as active participants in the development of a stronger aspirational culture. The school, with the involvement of the local authority and through its own brokerage, has amassed significant external support to enhance the capacity of the improvement agenda to succeed. School leaders now need to focus on managing that support to bring about accelerated improvement which has an impact on student attitudes to learning and improves their learning outcomes.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose subject to the actions required above.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose subject to the actions required above.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely



Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector