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21 May 2015

Mrs Margaret Rannard
Principal
West Derby School
365 West Derby Rd
Liverpool
Merseyside
L13 7HQ

Dear Mrs Rannard

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to West Derby School, Liverpool

Following my visit to your school on 20 May 2015, 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 January 2015. 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 academy should take further action to:

- further strengthen its action plan and departmental plans to ensure an even sharper focus on previously underachieving groups of pupils and individuals
- ensure strong support for the induction of the new headteacher in September
- continue to work with external providers of support for the academy's improvement, to ensure that the academy provides a good education for all its pupils, especially in mathematics.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher and those in charge of subjects and other aspects of the school's work. I also met a representative of the Governing Body and held a telephone call with the Chair of Governors. Additionally, I met with two representatives of Liverpool Local Authority, from whom the academy has chosen to contract support for its improvement. These discussions related to the action the academy has taken since the last Section 5 inspection.

The school's action plan was evaluated. I made a brief tour of the academy, and considered a range of documentation, including those relating to the school's arrangements for safeguarding, including the single central record, which I found to meet all requirements. I also looked at the academy's records of monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching, information on students' achievement and minutes of meetings of the Governing Body.

Context

Four teachers have left the school since the last inspection. The headteacher will retire this summer and the current deputy headteacher has been appointed to succeed her in September.

Main findings

The school's action plan is sharply focused on actions that need to be taken to speed up the improvement of students' achievement. The plan demonstrates the capacity to ensure that the school improves quickly enough to become good by the time of the next S5 inspection. However, the plan should be further adapted to focus every action explicitly on those pupil groups that previously under-achieved, notably the disadvantaged, the most able and some middle and lower ability boys in mathematics.

The headteacher, senior leaders and those in charge of subjects and other aspects of the academy's work share an acceptance of the judgements from the previous inspection. Together they have put in place effective systems for the improvement of teaching. Teachers also benefit from good quality training and increased opportunities to share the good practice that exists in the academy. The academy's records show that, as a result, teaching over time is predominantly good. Nevertheless, senior leaders are aware that more needs to be done, to increase the outstanding teaching that is needed to challenge all students to make the progress of which they are capable. They know that the remaining teaching that requires improvement must be swiftly eradicated.

Systems for performance management are similarly robust and senior leaders have not shied away from moving teachers on, when they fail to improve their practice.

While the academy's overall action plan is broadly well-focused on the recommendations from the last inspection, departmental action plans are not always incisive and focused directly on the improvement of the achievement of key groups of pupils. Plans vary in quality and potential effectiveness. Nevertheless, middle leaders show considerable capacity to improve the school further. They are an enthusiastic, cohesive team and they are well able to challenge each other. They are knowledgeable professionals who are determined to play their part in improving the school quickly.

Current predictions on pupils' outcomes in the 2015 GCSE examinations appear set to improve across a range of measures. For example the proportion of students who are on track to achieve five GCSE passes, including English and mathematics is increasing, as well as the proportion of students across year groups making and exceeding expected progress.

In the Sixth Form progress is also improving, but achievement is stronger in Year 12 than in Year 13. The school recognises that there is more work to be done to ensure that both year groups make and exceed the progress expected of them.

Governors are experienced and highly committed to the school's improvement. They have shown resilience in helping to chart a steady course for the school's improvement since the last inspection. Inspection evidence shows that they now have good knowledge of the use of assessment information and use it to ask increasingly challenging questions of the school.

The pupil premium funding (additional funding allocated for students known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority) is wisely spent. Its impact is seen in the fact that gaps are beginning to narrow for some of these students, especially those of lower ability.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The academy maintains a very positive relationship with the local authority. Senior leaders make wise choices about the services on which they wish to draw. In particular, the academy's school improvement partner is commissioned from the local authority to support the quality assurance of the academy's work.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Liverpool and as below.

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk
- For academies [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]