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18 June 2015

Mr Paul Hodgkinson
Interim Executive Headteacher
Lever Park School
Stocks Park Drive
Horwich
Bolton
Lancashire
BL6 6DE

Dear Mr Hodgkinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lever Park School

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 June 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2014. 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

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

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 Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the Director of Children's Services for Bolton.

Yours sincerely

Nick Whittaker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2014

- Ensure leaders and managers improve the achievement of students by:
 - making sure more students are accessing full-time provision
 - reviewing behaviour strategies for the impact they have on students' attitudes towards learning
 - using progress and attainment data about groups of different ability students, including the most-able, to check they are being appropriately challenged to deepen and extend their learning in all subjects
 - reviewing the curriculum content and range of qualifications to ensure they meet the needs of all students.
- Improve the quality of teaching in order to accelerate students' progress and raise their attainment by:
 - reviewing the impact of verbal and written feedback on students' progress and ensuring students act on guidance they are given to rectify mistakes or misconceptions in their knowledge, skills and understanding
 - giving staff the opportunity to see outstanding practice
 - having a more comprehensive and transparent system of evaluating the quality of teaching.
- Build leadership capacity so leadership is not over-reliant on the headteacher by:
 - ensuring that all teachers and support staff have a progression plan for their professional development, linked to their roles and responsibilities, and that its impact is rigorously checked
 - involving senior and middle leaders in a rigorous quality assurance process so they fully evaluate the impact of their actions to improve performance in the school
 - improving the recording of the outcomes of safeguarding concerns and the consistency of records of restrictive physical intervention
 - extending opportunities for staff to develop leadership skills.
- Improve the governance of the school and the governing body's ability to support and hold the school to account for its performance by:
 - increasing governors' awareness of recent educational changes so they check that the curriculum and website are compliant with regulations

- ensuring governors verify evidence provided by the school so they make informed judgements about the quality of teaching and the progress of groups of students including the most-able and disadvantaged students
- ensuring that the governing body evaluates its own impact on the school's development
- ensuring that all safeguarding practices are robust, consistent and applicable to all staff and students
- ensuring governors calculate any potential risks associated with conflicts of interest in the senior leadership team especially regarding safeguarding practices.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16 to 17 June 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim executive headteacher, senior and middle leaders, a group of students and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). The inspector had discussions with Lever Park's School Improvement Partner and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the local authority has confirmed that the interim executive headteacher will lead the school until the end of the autumn term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's current assessment information shows that students' achievement is beginning to improve. Students say that better teaching is helping them to make faster progress in lessons. This was evident in the lessons seen and in the quality of work seen in students' books and folders.

Senior leaders are regularly checking the accuracy of assessment information and are making better use of this information to identify the students who need extra support and help. These students receive additional teaching in English and mathematics and quickly get back on track. The strategies used in these lessons, although successful, are not yet being used consistently by all teachers. As a consequence, the full benefit of interventions is sometimes lost.

Students at Lever Park have significant ground to gain and, although the recent improvements are promising, achievement over time remains highly variable. In some subjects, art for example, all Year 11 students are predicted to make good progress and achieve their target GCSE grades, while in other subjects very few students are predicted to achieve their targets.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. The most effective learning observed was typified by teachers providing activities that are carefully matched to students' interests and levels of ability, and systematic checking of their progress. In these lessons, students respond confidently and enthusiastically, and progress well.

Some learning activities do not challenge students to use and apply what they have learned, for example, to solve problems or tackle exam-style questions. This means that some students, especially the most able, are not always stretched. The least able students do not always develop their knowledge and skills quickly enough, or consolidate what they have already learned. This is because some learning activities are not organised well enough to build students' learning sequentially or teachers

miss opportunities to check their progress throughout the lesson. Books are marked regularly and teachers consistently identify strengths and areas for improvement in students' work. 'Fix it' time at the start of lessons gives students the opportunity to correct any errors in previous work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour in lessons is improving and incidents of challenging behaviour are decreasing. Some low-level disruptive behaviour persists and, when unchallenged, it continues to hinder students' learning and achievement.

Students' attitudes to learning are improving. When teaching is interesting and motivating, students respond confidently and enthusiastically. However, teaching does not always help them to develop good habits for learning, for example, learning to wait and take turns or learning how to work co-operatively with other students.

Safeguarding arrangements have recently been reviewed and the schools' record-keeping systems have been further strengthened. Students say that they feel safe. They confidently explain what they do when they need help and say that they value the recently introduced keyworker system.

Levels of absence, including persistent absence, have increased since the 2013 to 2014 academic year. These high levels of absence continue to impact on students' achievement. Urgent action is needed to strengthen this aspect of the school's work.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There has been no let-up in the drive for improvement at Lever Park. The interim executive headteacher and senior leaders remain sharply focused on the areas for improvement and are resolute in their actions.

Systems to support improvement are more embedded and there are promising signs of improvement in teaching and achievement. Senior and middle leaders are monitoring the school's work more carefully. The in-depth monitoring of teaching, for example, is helping leaders to identify the aspects of lessons that are improving and those that require further intervention to strengthen teachers' practice.

Leaders are sharply focused on preparing young people for future learning and the world of work and they give an extremely high regard to students' views. As a consequence, leaders are already making changes to the curriculum and new GCSE courses, vocational courses, and an options programme, are planned for the autumn term.

Members of the IEB are keeping a close eye on the school's effectiveness. They expect detailed reports about the impact of the school's work and thoroughly check the accuracy and reliability of all the information they receive. IEB members do not hold back in the way they challenge and hold the school's senior leaders to account.

External support

The local authority has brokered the support needed to strengthen leadership and governance at Lever Park. Partnerships with local secondary schools and pupil referral units remain strong. Collaborative work focusing on the development of assessment systems and the Key Stage 4 curriculum, for example, is enhancing the school's capacity for improvement.

The leadership of Lever Park beyond the end of the autumn term is unclear. An academy solution and sponsorship arrangements are currently being explored by the local authority. No time should be wasted in confirming the long-term strategy for the school and securing Lever Park's future leadership and governance.