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22 June 2015

Mr Ben Dunne
Principal
Penketh High School
Heath Road
Warrington
Cheshire
WA5 2BY

Dear Mr Dunne

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Penketh High School, Warrington

Following my visit to your school on 22 June 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 March 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 school should take further action to:

- sharpen its action plan by including a broader range of evidence to demonstrate the impact of leaders' actions, and by ensuring that appropriate milestones are in place to support governors in holding the school's leaders to account
- improve students' attendance across the school by developing a rigorous tracking system so that parents can be alerted to concerns, and encouraged to work with the school to secure improvements
- improve the reliability of the schools' assessments of students' work by working with other schools to moderate teachers' judgements.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, two vice principals, middle leaders and the Chair and members of the Governing Body, along with a local authority senior advisor, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I had a guided tour of the school with an assistant principal and met separately with a range of students who discussed the work of the school. I considered various documents detailing actions and progress to date. I also scrutinised a range of documentation, including information on students' current progress and initiatives to improve teaching. I spent some time observing pupils' learning in lessons and briefly looked at their work in books.

Context

Since the March inspection, you have reflected on your staffing structure and made changes to the responsibilities of members of the senior leadership team. Leadership is now tightly focused so that roles are linked to the strengths of individual leaders; this means that senior leaders are more able to drive forward the school's improvement plans. There have been some staff changes since the last inspection. Leadership of mathematics is being strengthened in the temporary absence of the head of mathematics. You have appointed a leader to be second in charge of mathematics from within the school to work alongside a vice principal, who will oversee the work of mathematics. Two members of staff have left for maternity leave and two have returned.

Main findings

You have taken strong action since the last inspection to tackle the areas identified as requiring improvement. Leaders are working with a shared energy, desire and determination to make a difference to young people's lives. The improvement plan will be a useful tool in driving improvements as it identifies the right actions needed to improve student outcomes across the school. On occasions the plan leans heavily on achievement data for evidence of impact. This reduces the plan's potential for driving change because it does not take into account the rich variety of qualitative measures that could be considered when evaluating improvement. You have clearly identified which staff are accountable for specific improvements and you have established milestones for them to reach; however, some milestones are not currently placed at the most appropriate points within the school year.

Governors have an accurate picture of what the school needs to do to improve learning. They are now keeping a closer eye on improvement by assigning themselves to review key areas of the plan, matched to their personal strengths and interests. Governors are an intrinsic part of the school family, sharing a common vision for improvement. Governors have strengthened their monitoring role by adjusting meetings to incorporate school developments. You have streamlined the data that you provide to governors and they now have a clear understanding of the

school's strengths and weaknesses. They are better equipped to support and challenge you on your leadership of the school's journey to become good. Governors continue to ensure the school meets statutory requirements for the safeguarding of pupils, including the checking of the suitability of staff to work in the school.

The recommendation to reduce the variability in teaching so that all is consistently good or better is being taken seriously by all leaders. There is an intensified approach to improving the quality of teaching across the school. You now carry out additional learning walks throughout the school to monitor progress, celebrate good practice, and challenge improvements to learning. Leaders have refined the use of lesson observation outcomes; these are now linked to personal support, and development for all staff. Good practice in teaching is now better identified and shared to drive further improvement across the school. Data provided to middle leaders from the senior leadership team is easier to understand and indicates progress and attainment for all groups of students. This empowers middle leaders to work closely with subject teachers, tailoring the right classroom strategies to raise progress and attainment. This approach was apparent in my brief visits to lessons; students worked productively and cooperatively in a calm, supportive atmosphere.

The attainment and progress of students in the sixth form is now at the forefront of leaders' decision-making. The accountability of subject leaders for sixth form improvement has been raised and staff are now aware of the importance of the profile of achievement in the sixth form. Sixth form students now receive more teaching and support in preparation for their mathematics and English GCSE re-sits. You have also recognised that future entrants to the sixth form need to have a greater understanding of course demands and subject teachers are advising them accordingly. Subject leaders are investigating the further use of vocational pathways to improve the choice beyond 16. Sixth form leaders have now sought peer support from a local outstanding sixth form college in a bid to raise standards.

The school is re-modelling the pastoral system and moving from a house system to a year group model by September 2015. You believe this will improve consistency of approach and drive better standards of attendance and punctuality. Leaders have begun sharing information in preparation for the changes in September 2015. Leaders recognise that some students need additional care and support at the start of a school day, and they are now providing this through the school's 'orchard centre.' The importance of attendance has been raised within the sixth form and electronic registration is being trialled. However, attendance and punctuality are not improving fast enough and not enough has been done to tackle the attitudes of students arriving late or not arriving at all. Leaders recognise the need to improve the engagement of these students in readiness for the new academic year.

The recent inspection recognised a need to improve students' achievement in mathematics in Years 7 to 11. Staffing issues have been improved by the recruitment of new staff, and work is underway to secure a more consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics from September 2015. With additional

strategic support now provided by the vice principal, achievement at Key Stage 4 shows signs of improvement. Mathematics GCSE outcomes are predicted to be significantly better in the summer of 2015.

The external review of the school's use of the pupil premium recommended in the inspection report has begun but is not yet complete. School leaders are acutely aware of the urgent need to complete the review and preliminary meetings have already been wisely used; these have involved reviewing documentation and scrutinising historic and current student performance. Senior leaders are aware that increasing middle leadership accountability is needed to ensure that money invested has more of an impact on students' progress. Leaders at all levels now share a common vision and a clear focus for school improvement. A lot has been done in the relatively short period of time since the last inspection. It is too soon to assess the impact of new initiatives at this stage, but staffing re-structure and improved procedures have provided a firm foundation on which to build. You are clear that the impact of any changes will need to be checked carefully to make ensure they improve teaching and help pupils to make the progress of which they are capable. It is also clear that all leaders are committed to bringing about rapid improvement to get the school to be good as quickly as possible.

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 local authority recognises that the school requires improvement, is confident in the leadership and endorses the strategic direction that the school is taking. The support provided by the local authority is proportionate to the school's needs. The school is drawing on external support well. Peer support is provided by the Warrington Challenge: a group of school leaders working together driving improvement through support and challenge.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Warrington and The Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Dawn Platt

Her Majesty's Inspector