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01 July 2015

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 30 June 2014, 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 second 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.

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 behaviour policy
- ensure that students' achievement in science improves rapidly.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and two groups of students. I evaluated the school self-evaluation document and scrutinised student achievement data. I also made a short visit to the special educational needs department, and to English, French, Learn 4 Life and drama lessons.

## **Main findings**

Since my last visit in September 2014, you and other senior leaders have continued to drive improvements across the school. As a result, you have taken significant steps forward on your journey to becoming a good school at the time of your next section 5 inspection.

Over recent months, your senior leadership team has worked collaboratively to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching, which has had a positive impact on students' progress. You have not shied away from making tough staffing decisions in a manner which you describe as, 'rigorous but not ruthless'.

The new associate deputy headteacher, who was appointed at Easter, has added capacity to the senior leadership team. It is clear from my discussion with him that the positive predictions for the summer examination results are based on a robust system of tracking students' progress. His leadership of this area, coupled with strong internal and external moderation procedures, means that the achievement data are now much more secure. The school's own judgement on the improvement in the quality of teaching is underpinned by these data on students' progress as well as lesson observations.

The attainment and progress of Year 11 students is predicted to improve in English and mathematics this year. Gaps between disadvantaged students and their peers, are also likely to close, significantly so when comparing the progress they make in English and mathematics. The positive picture in these two subjects is not, however, matched by the predicted outcomes for students in science. You are aware of the issues that have led to this situation, and have already put plans in place to tackle them. The progress of students in Key Stage 3 in science presents a more encouraging picture than Key Stage 4.

At the last section 5 inspection, the achievement of the most able was identified as an area for improvement. Although there has been some progress in this area, it remains a cause for concern, particularly in Key Stage 3. A work scrutiny revealed that there is still insufficient challenge for students in Year 7, which is particularly concerning as I commented upon this following my last monitoring inspection.

When I visited classrooms, I was impressed by the continued improvement in students' attitudes to learning. Some of the students I spoke to felt that they were benefiting from better teaching which was helping them to improve their grades. The Key Stage 3 students in the discussion felt that the behaviour policy was making a difference but were frustrated that there remained a minority of staff who were not using the system properly. Consequently, there are still some occasions where their learning is being disrupted; this is particularly the case in low ability sets and during afternoon lessons.

The calm atmosphere that I commented upon in my last letter continues to pervade the school. I noticed that displays around departments reflect a focus on learning. You have had some success in improving the capacity of middle leaders but recognise that there is still work to be done to ensure consistent high quality at this level of leadership. You will be appointing a new director of science and English in the new academic year, and we discussed how important these two middle leadership positions are to the ongoing improvement journey at Astley.

The strengthened governing body continues to be a driving force for improvement. Knowing the school extremely well, the Chair of Governors is well placed to provide the appropriate challenge to you and other leaders. Governors and senior leaders are united in their core purpose of improving the progress and outcomes for students across the school.

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**

You and other leaders continue to benefit from a strong relationship with the local authority. They have played a key role in strengthening the governing body and the wider leadership of the school. My discussion with the local authority officer revealed that he has an accurate assessment of where the school is on its improvement journey.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne

**Her Majesty's Inspector**