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Mr Philip Wilson
Headteacher
Droylsden Academy
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Droylsden
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Greater Manchester
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Dear Mr Wilson

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Droylsden Academy

Following my visit to your school on 7 July 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in March 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Executive Director for Tameside.

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion which is good or better by ensuring that:
 - teachers' expectations are consistently high
 - teachers use the available data on students' achievement and their own assessments more effectively to plan lessons that take better account of students' starting points
 - teachers challenge different groups of learners more appropriately
 - teachers identify and use opportunities to develop students' literacy, numeracy and spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding in all subjects
 - marking is consistently good, providing clear feedback to students on how they can improve their work and checking that students respond
 - support by teaching assistants becomes fully effective through training and careful planning.

- Consolidate the very recent gains in students' achievement by:
 - speeding up the progress of all groups of students
 - closing the gaps in achievement between groups of students of different abilities, including those supported by the pupil premium.

- Further improve leadership by ensuring that:
 - the best practice already seen in the academy is shared more widely
 - the responsibility and accountability of middle leaders is further extended
 - senior leaders and governors complete the development of the academy improvement plan so that improvement proceeds at the rapid pace required
 - an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, is undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 7 July 2015

Evidence

The inspector met with the executive headteacher, headteacher, senior leaders and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, who are also representatives of the sponsor. The inspector met with two groups of Key Stage 3 students and carried out a scrutiny of their work. Only Key Stage 3 students were in the academy on the day of the inspection as Key Stage 4 students were involved in a college transition event and a field trip. The inspector observed four lessons covering mathematics, science and languages. Senior leaders accompanied the inspector on these observations. The inspector also looked closely at data related to students' achievement.

Context

There have been significant changes at senior leadership level since the last monitoring inspection. In March 2015, an executive headteacher was appointed to a permanent post. His previous role was headteacher of Mossley Hollins High School in Tameside and he is now executive headteacher of both this school and Droylsden Academy. In April, following a national selection procedure, the acting Principal, was appointed to the permanent position of headteacher of the academy. A deputy headteacher has been appointed internally to lead on teaching and learning. There has been a further internal appointment to the position of senior assistant headteacher to lead on raising achievement across the academy. Three other assistant headteachers have been appointed externally to lead on the following areas: mathematics; science and technology; assessment driven teaching; curriculum; learning support and personal development; behaviour and attendance; and community. A senior leader from an academy in a neighbouring local authority has been seconded to the academy over recent months and will continue until the end of the autumn term. A new business manager has also been recently appointed.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The impact of the focused actions of the new senior leadership team can be seen in the improved progress of students. It is clear that senior leaders have the necessary skills and capacity to lead the academy on its continued journey of sustained improvement. They are benefiting from the clear strategic leadership of the executive headteacher who has a strong track record in ensuring that all students make the best possible progress, especially those who are disadvantaged. Taking their lead from the executive headteacher and headteacher, senior leaders are driven by a determination to get the best for all students.

The strength of the existing senior leadership team is a result of some decisive and thoughtful action by governors and sponsors. The leadership arrangements that are now in place have brought much needed stability and capacity to the academy. Governors feel they now have the right people and structures in place to take the

academy forward in a sustained manner. They know how important it is to have outstanding practitioners at senior leadership level and have supported the strengthening of the team. Governors have looked at their own operating procedures and have redesigned these for the coming year to ensure they are in the best position to monitor and evaluate the impact of leaders' actions across the academy.

The academy's self-evaluation is accurate and underpinned by rigorous and robust quality assurance systems. Planning documents to tackle specific areas of weakness are entitled 'rapid response action plans' reflecting the urgency which leaders know is required. They are acutely aware that too many students have already been failed by these weaknesses. There are very clear lines of accountability, particularly between middle and senior leaders. Members of the senior leadership team have a high level of subject knowledge and expertise in the key departmental areas for which they are responsible.

The single central record (the register of checks on adults working with children in the academy) continues to be managed extremely well and fully meets all requirements.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Senior leaders have taken a range of actions to ensure that the predictions for students' performance at the end of Year 11 are accurate. Predictions of outcomes in English have been accurate over recent years, but this has not been the case for other subjects, particularly in mathematics. There is increased rigour in the marking of students' controlled assessments and mock examination papers. These are not only internally moderated, but a sample is also sent to external examiners.
- It is clear that the positive predictions for the summer examination results are now based on a robust system of tracking students' progress. They indicate that the attainment and progress of Year 11 students are set to improve in English and mathematics this year. It is particularly encouraging to note that the proportion of students predicted to make more than expected progress in these subjects is likely to be above or at least in line with the national figure. Attainment and progress gaps between disadvantaged students and their peers are also set to close.
- Senior leaders have had significant impact with the actions they have taken to eradicate inadequate teaching. In the very small number of cases where concerns remain, a formal programme of support exists. Senior leaders know the quality of teaching that is typically taking place in classrooms across the academy. Their judgement on the quality of teaching is based on scrutiny of students' work, students' progress data as well as lesson observations. The small number of lesson observations carried out during this inspection gave further evidence of the improving teaching profile and the impact of senior leaders' actions in this area. In these lessons, there was clear evidence of

positive relationships between teachers and the students, along with improved attitudes to learning.

- Staff have high expectations of students' behaviour both in the classroom and around the academy. Students arrive punctually to their lessons and settle quickly to their 'do now' task. Students conduct themselves in a calm, orderly manner during break, at the end of which they clear away all their plates and litter and move promptly to their next lesson.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The improvements that have been secured in English and mathematics are not yet evident in science. Although predicted outcomes indicate some slight improvement, students' attainment and progress in this subject are set to remain well below national averages. At the moment, the quality of teaching in this subject is not enabling students to achieve their potential. The assistant headteacher, who has recently been appointed to lead improvements in science, has a clear grasp of what needs to be done to tackle this key area of weakness within the academy.
- All students now have aspirational targets, and there was evidence in the lesson observations that some teachers have high expectations of what their students can achieve, but this is not consistent across the academy. There is more work to be done to improve the achievement of the most able in all subjects and year groups. A work scrutiny revealed particular concerns about low expectations and insufficient challenge for able boys in Key Stage 3.

External support

The executive headteacher has organised extensive support from senior and middle leaders at Mossley Hollins High School. For example, leaders from Mossley Hollins conducted external reviews in mathematics and science to ensure the correct topics and level of challenge are being delivered in lessons. Other support has been given in such areas as raising achievement, teaching and learning, human resources and finance.