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27 November 2015

Mr Paul Hodgkinson
Interim Executive Headteacher
Lever Park School
Stocks Park Drive
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Dear Mr Hodgkinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lever Park School

Following my visit to your school on 17 and 18 November 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 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher 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 third monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 November 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 teachers, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), Lever Park's School Improvement Partner (SIP) and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, an interim deputy headteacher has been appointed and the interim executive headteacher's secondment to the school has been extended to the end of the spring term.

Outcomes for pupils

Assessment information shows that students are making faster progress in Years 7, 8 and 9. This was also evident in lessons and in the quality of work seen in students' books and folders. Students in Years 10 and 11 are beginning to gain lost ground. GCSE grades achieved by Year 11 students in 2015 improved significantly and more students progressed successfully to the next stage of their education.

Higher expectations are more evident in the school's target setting and tracking system. Students' week-by-week progress is closely monitored by senior leaders and those needing extra support and help are quickly identified. Additional teaching in English and mathematics helps these students to develop their knowledge and skills and build their confidence. As a result, they quickly get back on track.

Students make fastest progress when learning activities are closely matched to their levels of ability and teachers systematically check and assess their progress. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson, for example, students quickly developed their knowledge of the properties of simple and compound shapes. This was because the teacher identified the next step in learning for each student and the work set was pitched at the right level.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving. Teachers are capturing and holding students' interest more effectively and, as a consequence, students are making faster progress.

Students' work is marked regularly and in depth. Written feedback in books clearly identifies what students have done well and what they need to improve. Students

are given time to correct errors and improve their work on 'Fix-it Fridays' and 'Mend-it Mondays'. They use this time well and value the additional help they receive.

Some teachers are still not using assessment information well enough to pitch work at the right level. This means that the most-able students are not always stretched by more demanding work. Similarly, weaknesses in students' literacy and numeracy skills are sometimes overlooked and the work they are set is too hard. As a consequence, they rely too heavily on the support they receive from additional adults and make too little progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school's higher expectations and more consistent use of rewards and sanctions have led to tangible improvements in students' behaviour. Low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons is now rare. Students know what it means to be a 'Lever Park Learner' and they value the praise and rewards they receive for positive behaviour.

Students are developing more positive attitudes to learning. They apply themselves well to tasks, work hard in lessons, and ask and answer questions more confidently. These better learning habits are less evident on the few occasions when teachers' expectations of students are not clear or high enough.

Safeguarding arrangements have been further strengthened. Teachers and adults know each student well and are alert to the signs of neglect or harm. A new 'keyworking' system is improving communication between home and school. Records show that when concerns about a student's welfare are identified, leaders are quick to secure the help needed.

Levels of absence and persistent absence remained well above national averages in 2015. Despite a new approach, which has increased the attendance of some students, overall improvement has been negligible. The drive for better attendance needs to continue and intensify.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim executive headteacher and senior leaders are relentless in their drive for improvement. They have remained focused on the areas for improvement and are uncompromising in their actions.

Systems to support improvement are increasingly effective and there are demonstrable improvements in students' attitudes to learning and progress. Senior leaders are systematically checking important areas of the school's work. However, the monitoring of teaching needs a sharper focus on the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress, so that areas for improvement can be more quickly identified and tackled.

Members of the IEB continue to keep a close eye on the school's effectiveness. They carefully check the reports and information they receive and question senior leaders robustly. The IEB members have high expectations for students and bring drive and urgency to leadership and governance.

External support

The local authority has brokered the support needed to strengthen leadership and governance at Lever Park. An academy solution and sponsorship arrangements are progressing and the school's future leadership is more secure.

A stronger partnership with a local teaching school is adding much needed capacity to the drive for improving teaching, learning and assessment.