

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



14 October 2016

Mr Simon Lennox
Walkden High School
Old Clough Lane
Walkden
Worsley
Manchester
M28 7JB

Dear Mr Lennox

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Walkden High School

Following my visit to your school on 28–29 September 2016, 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 January 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in January 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- refine school improvement plans and self-evaluation documentation
- make targets for the most able pupils more challenging
- ensure that all monitoring is acutely focused on pupils' progress
- keep policies and the school website up to date with the government's guidance.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, members of the governing body, pupils, a representative of the local authority and the executive headteacher from the local teaching school to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A range of documentation was considered and the school improvement plan and self-evaluation were evaluated. A number of short visits to lessons took place and books were scrutinised. Records of visits from the teaching school were also considered.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, there have been a number of changes to the senior and middle leadership teams. A few new governors have been appointed. A number of teachers have left the school and new staff recruited.

Main findings

There is now a sense of urgency and the pace of change has picked up considerably. Pupils made better progress in last summer's examinations in a number of subjects including English, design and technology, physical education and art. However, the unpredicted poor results in mathematics and science were of concern. The school has taken swift action, with senior leaders now taking the lead in these departments in a bid to rapidly raise standards.

Leadership has been strengthened. The leadership and management of teaching and learning are improving. Expectations are high and leaders easily identify when groups of pupils are not making good enough progress. While much attention has been paid to the quality of teaching, leaders have been less effective at ensuring that all classrooms are suitable learning environments, particularly when they are open plan and it is difficult to hear the teacher.

Observations of teaching since the previous inspection show that the picture is improving and there is much good practice to build upon across many departments including English and modern foreign languages. However, opportunities are missed during lesson observations to write specifically about the current progress of the most able and disadvantaged pupils. This would help leaders check the accuracy of the pupils' progress information provided.

Teaching continues to improve. Teaching that is not good enough is being effectively tackled. Support from the teaching school is used well to help teachers hone their practice. Monitoring of standards is well organised with good use of external verification and moderation.

The governing body is challenging senior leaders more rigorously and understands the key aspects of school life that are a priority for improvement. Governors

understand what is being done to raise standards for disadvantaged pupils and are rightly pleased with some of the initial improvements. They know that they need to probe further to ensure that they hold every member of the large leadership team accountable for the impact of their actions. The governing body, however, has not focused enough upon ensuring that policies and the school website meet current government requirements.

The school improvement plan is very detailed and thorough, as is the self-evaluation documentation. Both these documents indicate that significant progress has been made since the inspection. These documents need to be refined into easily accessible, working documents with incremental, achievable milestones.

Pupils are predicted to make better progress in next summer's examinations. Much work has been done to moderate assessment, particularly in science, where internal assessment was identified as a key weakness last summer. However, there is still some variation in the standards of marking and assessment across departments that makes some data unreliable.

Information about pupils' progress is well organised and clearly tracked. Inspectors observed the most able pupils making strong progress due to higher levels of challenge in lessons. However, targets set by senior leaders for the most able pupils are still not challenging enough.

Some of the most able Year 10 pupils were observed in English. They were enthralled by their work on literary techniques due to the teacher's expert subject knowledge and inspirational exposition. Pupils behaved extremely well, showed very good understanding of English and applied their learning well both orally and in writing.

The attendance of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding who have been persistently absent from school is now improving. This is as a result of a very well-focused piece of work to improve their school experience and pastoral care. This demonstrates a good, strategic use of extra funding.

However, a significant amount of money from the pupil premium funding is paid in staff salaries for pastoral staff, teaching assistants and tutors. Expectations of these staff are sometimes unclear so it is difficult for governors to see what impact some of the funding is having and whether these staff offer good value for money.

External support

Good support is provided through the local teaching school. Records of visits are succinct and thorough. They drill down into the impact of the school's work to help disadvantaged pupils and show that, particularly in English, there is some success. The teaching school has helped in a number of areas, including ensuring that all pupils are in appropriate sets for their abilities, in helping governors to ask more

challenging questions, and in moderating assessments in science.

The school has been well supported strategically, resulting in a very thorough self-evaluation and detailed school improvement plan. The monitoring of teaching is rigorous. However, there has been less focus upon ensuring that policies and the school website meet statutory requirements and follow government guidance.

Governors have embraced the review of governance; they have visited a number of other governing bodies to refine the way that they work. The review of the impact of the pupil premium funding has been used with some success to refocus leaders upon the effectiveness of its use.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Salford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon

Her Majesty's Inspector