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Mr J Gannon
Headteacher
Hope Academy
Ashton Road
Newton-le-Willows
Merseyside
WA12 0AQ

Dear Mr Gannon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hope Academy, St. Helens

Following my visit to your academy on 18 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, students, the Governing Body, and a representative of the sponsor to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Documents pertaining to performance management, self-evaluation, current achievement and minutes of the Governing Body were scrutinised.

Context

There have been 6 voluntary redundancies since the section 5 inspection due to an on-going restructure.

Main findings

While you have responded to the recommendations from the Section 5 inspection, it is not clear what success will look like, when it will be achieved and who will be responsible. The targets set for the achievement of students overall and individually are not challenging enough. Performance management criteria are not focussed enough around whole school achievement, particularly for senior and middle leaders.

Schemes of work have been reviewed to make learning more engaging and all staff have taken part in training to make teaching more creative, to promote literacy and to plan for the needs of all abilities but the impact of this work is not yet evident.

Senior leaders have increased their monitoring activities to gain a more accurate view of teaching and behaviour over time. Students welcome the new on-line system for reporting their widespread concern about bullying as well as the higher profile of senior staff around their lessons, particularly when behaviour is not being well-managed.

Although Governors have some understanding of what Hope Academy needs to do to improve, they have not acted swiftly or robustly enough in challenging the headteacher. Lines of accountability between the sponsors and Governors appear blurred because some of the sponsors hold key roles in the Governing Body.

Senior leaders, governors and the sponsor are beginning to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Nevertheless, these actions have not had a significant enough impact on strengthening the most senior leadership and the quality of teaching. The school should take further action to:

- Sharpen school improvement plans so that the most senior leaders and governors can clearly measure the impact of actions.
- Set more challenging targets for achievement and school improvement.
- Revise the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders to increase the capacity around teaching, learning and behaviour.
- Make links with a national leader of governance to review governors' practice and help them hold senior leaders to account more effectively.
- Review policies for behaviour management and the prevention of bullying with students, parents and governors so that they are agreed and understood by all.
- Broaden the scope of student voice activities to gain a more representative view of the school population.
- Clarify lines of accountability between the sponsors and the Governing Body.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school is working with two consultants around behaviour for learning and engagement. Some support has been newly brokered through the local authority to improve systems for self-evaluation and to moderate the judgements of senior leaders. The heads of department for mathematics and English are also working with the local authority to strengthen their practice, which in turn is work that is being supported by HMI.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority, the Liverpool Catholic Archdiocese and the Church of England Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon

Her Majesty's Inspector