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Mr Stephen Brierley
Headteacher
The Deanery Church of England High School and Sixth Form College
Frog Lane
Wigan
Lancashire
WN1 1HQ

Dear Mr Brierley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Deanery Church of England High School and Sixth Form College, Wigan

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 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, other senior leaders and leaders in charge of subjects, the Chair and representatives of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and a range of documentation was considered, including the school's monitoring records of students' progress and of the quality of teaching, as well as minutes of Governing Body meetings. Additionally, a small sample of students' written work was considered.

Context

The Head of Sixth Form has been appointed as headteacher of the school from September 2013 and other new appointments have been made at senior and subject leader levels.

Main findings

Under your leadership the school has accepted very openly the weaknesses identified by the last inspection and all the staff and governors that I met during my visit were eager and confident to move forward on the school's journey to good. This positive attitude has helped you and your senior leaders to begin to tackle effectively the recommendations for improvement from the last inspection. For example, you have produced a school improvement plan in response to the Requires Improvement judgement that is detailed, thorough and fit for purpose. It is well focussed on the recommendations for improvement from the last inspection. Nevertheless you are aware that there still needs to be a much sharper link between each of your proposed actions and the progress of groups and individual students. The headteacher designate and leaders at all levels will also need to analyse assessment information in much finer detail in order to understand and accelerate rates of progress for different groups of students. The strengthened senior leadership team demonstrate good capacity to lead this initiative.

Current information on achievement in the summer 2013 GCSE examinations shows improved progress to be likely, especially in English. This is because you have taken quick action to make adjustments to staff responsibilities and new appointments from September should further strengthen teaching and learning. However, you recognise that all staff must have higher expectations of students if you are to sustain the momentum of improvement from September onwards.

You have also put in place a new policy for the improvement of teaching and learning and very rigorous arrangements for supporting and challenging under-performing staff and departments. Feedback to teachers on lesson observations is sharply focused and judgements are accurate. Early impact of these measures is evident in the improved performance of some teachers who have undergone this process and in the refreshed enthusiasm amongst the staff for sharing practice and learning from each other. You are using new technology well to support this development. Despite these improvements, more action is needed to ensure that all marking is of consistently good quality, especially in making sure that pupils know exactly how to improve their work, and that teachers' advice is regularly followed up by students.

Your vision for improving the school is fully supported by your successor, senior leaders and governors. However, you are aware that the number of newly appointed leaders joining the school in September will require support in establishing themselves in their new roles. Subject leaders are keen to be part of the process of improvement, but they too will require support in order to challenge those whom they lead effectively and confidently.

The governors fully support the school's determination to improve and are increasingly involved in the process. New appointments are strengthening further their capacity to hold the school to account. They have independently undertaken a review of their practice, and now investigate their own sources of information in order to challenge the school. They are knowledgeable about pupils' achievement and are unafraid to take difficult decisions about salary progression. They take seriously their responsibility for the management of pupil premium funding, but gaps in achievement between those known to be eligible for the pupil premium and other students, while narrowing, are not yet closing rapidly enough.

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 secure improvements by:

- Ensuring that all actions for improvement are firmly linked to raising students' achievement, especially for groups that have previously under-achieved, including those in receipt of the pupil premium and that
- All marking sets regular and appropriate targets for the further improvement of students' learning and teachers check regularly that their advice is followed up by students and by
- working with the local authority and other sources of support to put in place strong arrangements to support staff new to the school or taking up new roles and responsibilities, including the new headteacher and senior and subject leaders, so that they can be as effective as possible in the rapid improvement of the school.

External support

The local authority has good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and of the actions needed to improve its performance. They are investing considerable expertise to support the school. For example, two specialist consultants will work with the school on its areas for improvement and monitor its progress on a termly basis. Further training for governors is also planned. It is too early as yet to judge the impact of this provision.

The school has also brokered support from an outstanding school and this has already led to significant improvement in students' achievement in English.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing

Her Majesty's Inspector