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15 January 2014

Mrs Susan Yates  
Headteacher  
Blacon High School, A Specialist Sports College  
Melbourne Road  
Blacon  
Chester  
Cheshire  
CH1 5JH

Dear Mrs Yates

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Blacon High School, A Specialist Sports College, Cheshire West and Chester**

Following my visit to your school on 14 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- tighten the action plan so it reflects the impact the actions have on pupils' progress towards their targets every half-term
- extend the level of challenge for more-able pupils across all subjects.

**Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, your senior leadership team, the Chair and another member of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school development plans were evaluated. I also examined the revised school self-evaluation form, attendance data, pupil progress data, the latest report to the

Governing Body and the evaluations of lesson observations and work scrutiny. I was shown around the school by three pupils and a member of the senior leadership team and visited a number of lessons to look at displays, talk to pupils and look at their books.

### **Main findings**

You, the governors and the staff have a real desire and energy to continue to improve the school and raise the achievement and aspirations of all the pupils. The development plan focuses clearly on all of the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection. However, parts of it are not sufficiently precise about when and how the impact of activities will be evaluated to ensure progress for pupils is maintained.

Since the recent inspection you have revised the student outcome targets to set a more challenging level of progress based on the pupils' prior ability. You have increased the level of support for pupils who are having difficulty with their work and use interventions that you know are effective. Pupils are able to explain how effective the system is and appreciate the extra support. Pupils' aspirations are raised through the school's links with Chester University; through the bursaries programme; and, by ensuring all pupils have an appropriate curriculum and study appropriate courses throughout Key Stage 3 and 4. Pupils' attitudes to learning are monitored in every lesson and pupils are taught how to take more responsibility for their behaviour and understand the consequences for their actions. Pupils are able to explain how this system works and how their behaviour has improved as a result of the monitoring and feedback.

The quality of teaching has improved as evidenced through the school's rigorous programme of lesson observations. For example: all teachers who teach practical subjects have been observed in theory lessons to ensure quality teaching across all aspects of their subject. Focused subject reviews have taken place and show evidence of teachers matching tasks to pupils' abilities and using resources effectively. Lesson observations have focused on specific groups of pupils, including the most-able, to ensure that teachers are challenging and supporting these pupils to extend the progress they make.

You have increased support for staff and also increased accountability. All teachers have been set clear targets regarding their responsibility for pupils' progress, the quality of marking and feedback given to pupils, and improving writing and reading skills in every subject area. All teachers have received training on improving writing skills and have worked together to improve the quality of pupils' writing across the school. This was demonstrated during my visit when I saw books and talked to pupils in class. All classrooms display clear grade criteria which pupils say help them with their targets during their lessons. Displays also provide evidence to suggest that literacy is consistently supported across all subject areas. During my tour of the school, pupils explained how the challenges in science classes are used to motivate

pupils who complete their work before others; however, this level of challenge for the most-able pupils has yet to be extended across all subjects.

You have created two single-sex registration groups for pupils in Years 9-11 and given opportunities for increased participation in early-morning school activities to motivate pupils to attend school and be on time. Although this has only recently been introduced, pupils' attendance and punctuality have improved in both groups.

The Governing Body has increased its membership and the range of experience and skills its members bring to governance. Governors are aware of their training needs and are proactive about improving their skills to support the school and analyse the performance data to secure further improvement. They offer a good level of support and challenge and have confidence in the school and its leaders to continue to improve.

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 local authority representative has been working closely with the school leadership team to speed up the process of assessing the progress pupils make and communicating this to staff so that pupils who are struggling are supported more quickly. The local authority representative has met with governors and, through his work with you and your team, he is confident this is a 'can do' school which listens, is committed to constant improvement and has the capacity to improve to good and beyond.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester.

Yours sincerely

Christina McIntosh

### **Her Majesty's Inspector**

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority