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3 June 2014

Mrs Janice Rowlands
Headteacher
The Deanery Church of England High School and Sixth Form College
Frog Lane
Wigan
Lancashire
WN1 1HQ

Dear Ms Rowlands

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 2 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 second 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, I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders, including the head of sixth form, and the Chair of the Governing Body, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also considered a range of documentation about the school's work, for example the outcomes of your monitoring of teaching and the impact of performance management, information on current levels of achievement by students, minutes of meetings of the Governing Body and a progress report from a consultant who has been providing support for the school's improvement. I made several short visits to lessons to sample the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour and discussed with students their work and views about the school.

Context

A new head of the history department has been appointed since the recent section 5 inspection. All safeguarding checks concerning this person meet requirements. There are no other changes to staffing since the first monitoring visit.

Main findings

There are signs of significant further improvement since my last visit to the school. All staff whom I met during this inspection were clear that this is because of the very clear vision and high expectations that you and your senior leaders communicate to them. Consequently staff and students have great respect for you. You have further tightened already robust systems for holding teaching staff to account for students' progress. This includes through very focused professional training on the use of assessment information to identify students' underachievement accurately and set sharper targets for improvement. You have heeded messages about future inspections and are already using a wider range of evidence to give you a secure evaluation of teaching and learning which is typical over time. As a result, the great majority of teaching is leading to consistently better learning. This was confirmed by my visits to classes during the inspection.

Your determination to improving the quality of marking and feedback to students on how to improve their work has had a strongly positive impact. Marking is now consistently informative and a real dialogue about learning is evident in students' written work. This motivates students greatly. They are very courteous and cooperative young people who have very positive attitudes to learning.

You and senior leaders are aware that there is a small amount of teaching that is not yet consistently good. Where this is the case, you can point to a good track record of those teachers who have been tightly monitored by a support plan becoming good teachers or being moved on.

The higher quality teaching across the school is leading to improved achievement by students on a range of measures. After a dip in 2013, your own very detailed and thorough assessment information points to a rising overall trend in the proportion of students who gain five A*-C GCSE grades including English and mathematics, and outcomes that are likely to be above the national average in the 2014 examinations. Results in almost all other GCSE subjects are also likely to have improved on the 2013 outcomes. The overall proportions of students who make and exceed expected progress in English and mathematics are also predicted to be above average in 2014.

In terms of specific groups, the proportion of students supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding) who are making expected progress is rising in English. Progress in mathematics is not as swift. The proportion of this group of students that are exceeding expected progress is also growing rapidly.

As a result of the work of the recently appointed learning mentor and your more rigorous systems for identifying and tracking the progress of those students who require more support, gaps in achievement for some students who have a disability or special educational needs are narrowing and even reversing. However, you and your senior leaders recognise that there remains more work to do in order to ensure that all students progress equally well, whatever forms of support they receive.

Achievement in the sixth form is improving in vocational subjects and at Advanced Supplementary (AS) level. Many students are benefitting from the additional support from a dedicated sixth form teaching assistant. Progress in Advanced level (A2) courses is not yet as strong. You realise that this is at least in part because sixth form teachers do not always have the same opportunities as are routine in the main school, to check with other subject experts the accuracy of their predictions and judgements about students' progress.

You and the senior leaders are ably supported by the governing body. Members show great commitment to the school's improvement and are very knowledgeable about its finances, including expenditure for students supported by the pupil premium. They are increasingly capable of challenging the school and are taking steps to improve their practice still further.

Since the last inspection you have all worked together tirelessly to secure many rapid improvements and have tackled all the recommendations from the last inspection. This demonstrates the school's strong capacity for further improvement.

External support

The support that the local authority has organised for the school, from an ex-Her Majesty's inspector continues to be very effective, contributing much to the school's self-evaluation and improvement.

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