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Miss Jan Levenson
Headteacher
Hilbre High School Humanities College
Frankby Road
Wirral
Merseyside
CH48 6EQ

Dear Miss Levenson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hilbre High School Humanities College, Wirral

Following my visit to your academy on 17 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2104. 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 academy should take further action to:

- maintain the rapid improvement needed to become at least good at its next inspection by sharpening the post-Ofsted improvement plan with more precise details of the intended impact of actions and the interim steps towards this, specifying how governors will check that this impact has happened and ensuring that targets include details of the progress expected from groups of students
- ensure that, once confirmed by governors, the new policy on marking is rapidly and consistently implemented so that teachers' better marking leads to students' faster learning.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, senior leaders responsible for the quality of teaching and for raising achievement, the subject leaders for English and mathematics, the head of the sixth form, a group of seven most-able students, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The post-Ofsted improvement plan and other documents were evaluated. Visits to classrooms took place accompanied by a senior leader.

Context

The posts of two temporary senior leaders have been made permanent. The roles of senior leaders have been extended to include oversight of subject areas. Governors have changed their responsibilities so that each key improvement priority is monitored by a governor.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors responded quickly to the inspection findings. They have accelerated improvements planned from the start of the academic year, for example, in developing the new policies for marking, and the management of teachers' performance. New initiatives have led to closer links between senior leaders and subject leaders so that subject leaders receive greater challenge and closer support. Actions to rapidly increase the achievement of Year 11 students have led to faster progress. Senior leaders have an honest understanding of the progress the academy has made.

Through training and coaching activities which match teachers' needs, teaching is improving. Senior leaders' observations of teaching and learning indicate that less effective teachers are responding to this and practice is getting better. Teachers are contributing to a half-termly newsletter about effective approaches to teaching and learning so that good ideas can be shared. The students I met said that teachers have higher expectations of them and are setting more challenging work.

New tablet computers have been purchased allowing students better access to information and communication technology. This is supporting better learning such as in a Year 9 English lesson where students were highly motivated and learned well as they used the new computers to share good written work with the class. Learner journals which allow students to store pieces of assessed work have been introduced for sixth form students. The sixth form students I talked with said that this helped them learn by referring back to earlier work more easily and see the progress they have made. Senior leaders plan for learner journals to be used with other students in the next academic year.

Marking remains of inconsistent quality. A new policy has been developed and is being considered by governors. The policy expects teachers to mark in ways which support students' further learning. Senior leaders expect marking to improve when the policy is implemented in September.

Leadership and management are improving. Data on students' achievement is being better used, for example, in planning revision activities for Year 11 students. The closer links between senior leaders and subject leaders mean that more challenging conversations about students' progress are taking place. Teachers are putting more emphasis on students' progress in their discussions with parents at parents' evenings.

A new policy for teachers' performance management has been written. It is in the final stages of being confirmed by governors. This policy sets expectations to match the stage of teachers' careers and strengthens the link between teachers' pay progression and the progress their students make.

The Principal has taken the lead in organising a training programme intended to improve middle leadership with a group of local schools. Teachers taking part in this training are enthusiastic and positive about the effect on their practice.

Governors provide strong support and effective challenge to academy leaders. The width of governors' background and experience allows them to do so across the range of academy activity. Governors have increased the impact of their work since the inspection with more rigorous scrutiny by individual governors of each of the academy's improvement areas.

Senior leaders have prepared a post-Ofsted improvement plan. This includes a pledge to ensure that all students achieve well, receive high quality teaching and have a caring and supportive environment. The pledge sets a clear vision for the academy and indicates the determination of leaders and teachers to see this fully in place.

The plan details the actions to be taken to improve eight broad areas of the academy's performance. These incorporate the key areas identified during the inspection. The plan includes targets for the achievement of students. While these include the overall attainment and progress expected of Year 11 students in the next two years, they only refer to the attainment of specific groups of students. This means that it is harder to identify that all groups of students are making the progress required to ensure that the expected standards are reached. Indicators to judge the progress being made on the planned actions are also included. However, these do not always give enough detail to ensure that the expected final impact of the actions is clear or that improvement is easily checked at interim stages. Furthermore, the role of governors in checking on these is not specified. The plan

therefore needs to be sharpened to ensure that progress on all areas is as rapid as possible.

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

External support

Academy leaders have continued to have close links with the local authority. Local authority officers know the academy well and provide helpful advice and support to the academy. Effective partnerships are in place between the academy and other local schools, for example, in the shared approach to sixth form provision and in the recently started training for middle leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector