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26 September 2014

Mr Anthony Roberts
Headteacher
Castlebrook High School
Parr Lane
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Lancashire
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Dear Mr Roberts

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Castlebrook High School, Bury

Following my visit to your school on 25 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 June 2014. 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:

- sharpen the improvement plan by identifying how all middle leaders and teachers will be better held to account by being more fully included and by increasing the precision of the targets and success criteria
- ensure that any gaps in the achievement of different groups of students are more clearly highlighted to allow leaders and teachers to check that they are closing.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the faculty learning co-ordinators for English, mathematics and science, a group of nine students, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, and two

representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Documents, including the school improvement plan, summaries of students' achievement, policies related to learning and attendance and records of the local authority's work with the school were evaluated. Samples of students' work were examined. The single central record was scrutinised. A tour to see the school at work was undertaken, accompanied by you.

Context

A new Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body have been elected after the end of the terms of office and resignation from the governing body of the previous post-holders. Two new governors have been appointed. Two teachers have returned from long term absence and a temporary teaching post has been made permanent. The roles of senior leaders have been reorganised. A new electronic system to allow leaders and teachers to track students' progress has been installed.

Main findings

Senior leaders took immediate action in response to the inspection to raise expectations and increase accountability. The local authority has increased the support and challenge it offers.

Senior leaders have raised their expectations of staff and students. In particular, rates of progress of students are now expected to be at least as rapid as those found nationally. The middle leaders I met share senior leaders' determination that students should achieve more. A new approach to checking that students are doing as well as expected has been introduced. The approach extends and refines the effective work done in mathematics over the last three years. It includes 'flightpaths' which set out how each student is expected to move forward from their previous attainment and regular checking that students are on track. The checking is followed by 'pupil progress meetings' between senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers to plan how to speed up any slower progress identified. The new system is at a very early stage for subjects other than mathematics but students say that it is already helping them have more confidence about what they can achieve. They are pleased with the changes being made.

Senior leaders have produced a new policy for monitoring and evaluation. This has increased teachers' accountability, for example, through holding the 'pupil progress meetings'. Senior leaders are also analysing data on examination performance more rigorously to ensure that lessons can be learnt and any underperformance in particular classes discussed with the teachers concerned. The analysis of data is detailed and honest and indicates that, while rates of progress are below the national averages, they are already increasing. The analysis does not include a simple summary of the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and others. This makes it harder to ensure that this gap is closing.

The training offered to teachers has been increased. For example, middle leaders participate in nationally accredited programmes and individual training is provided for teachers if senior leaders have judged their teaching to be less effective. A coaching programme has been introduced to make it easier to share the most effective practice in the school.

Students' ideas are being more fully included in the school's plans. For example, student mentoring is to be introduced following a proposal from the students themselves. This will involve older students helping younger students catch up on any weaker areas in English and mathematics.

The governors are determined that the school should offer nothing less than the best quality of education possible. The new Chair and Vice-chair of Governors acknowledge that, in the past, governors have not been sufficiently challenging to senior leaders. The governing body is now requiring that information about the school's performance should be backed up by robust evidence. Governors are willing to seek additional support and challenge for themselves. This includes working with a National Leader of Governance to help them understand how to become more effective.

Senior leaders and governors have worked together to revise the school improvement plan. This includes appropriate actions to respond to the less effective areas of the school's work and steps to further improve students' already good behaviour. Individual governors have been allocated to provide detailed scrutiny of each section of the plan. A school improvement group including governors and a representative of the local authority has been set up to closely monitor its overall implementation. While the plan provides a clear structure for improvement, it is not clear enough in confirming the responsibility of all teachers and middle leaders to be fully involved and therefore accountable. In addition, more specific targets should be set so that teachers can more easily see how they can contribute and more precise success criteria specified to help senior leaders and governors understand whether actions are leading to the expected improvement.

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 has increased its level of support and challenge by allocating time to allow a lead officer to work with school leaders in addition to the school effectiveness partner already in place. The school effectiveness partner is extending his role to provide training for middle leaders. The local authority has already engaged a National Leader of Governance to work with the governing body and is actively investigating links with skilled practitioners to further support teaching and learning. Senior leaders have established links with two teaching schools to allow

subject leaders to learn by seeing effective practice and to support curriculum development.

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

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector