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15 December 2014

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

Dear Mrs 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 12 December 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 September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- make the required minor amendments to the school development plan, so that it shows precisely and clearly the intended impact of each action on the relevant key group of students
- ensure that subject leaders consistently use students' progress as the main indicator when checking the quality of teaching and learning
- increase the quantity of outstanding teaching across the school, in order to inspire all students to achieve as well as they can
- ensure that gaps in attainment and progress between key groups and subjects close rapidly
- ensure that the above actions raise achievement as effectively at Key Stage 3 as Key Stage 4.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority (LA) to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Students' outcomes from the 2014 GCSE examinations were considered, as well as information concerning the achievement of students' currently attending the school. Records of monitoring the impact of the school's revised systems and policies, such as arrangements for performance management, were also scrutinised, as well as evidence of students' rates of attendance and exclusion.

Context

There have been no staff changes since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require improvement.

Main findings

In the short time since the inspection you and your closely-knit team of senior leaders have lost no time in beginning to tackle the recommendations from that inspection. You, senior leaders and governors have worked tirelessly to maintain staff morale and confidence and to secure and strengthen the necessary momentum of the improvements that you achieved last year.

The new systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and performance management have further increased expectations that you have of the staff. You have made them more responsible for their own professional practice and for providing precise evidence to support pay progression. This has led to improvements in teaching and marking and you are working hard to eradicate the very small amount of teaching that requires improvement.

Subject leaders are enthusiastic and committed to the school becoming good. However, some subject leaders are not always consistent in their monitoring of the quality of marking. They also vary in their understanding and acceptance that students' progress from their starting points, rather than examination results, is the critical factor in evaluating teaching quality over time. You have put in place timely training to strengthen subject leaders' skills in this aspect of their work. You are also aware that there is also further work to do in increasing the quantity of outstanding teaching, in order to inspire all students to achieve as well as they can.

You have rightly begun to look outwards to other local good and outstanding schools from which teachers can learn to refresh their practice. A visit to a local primary school made a significant impact on one teacher I met during this monitoring visit. Seeing what pupils could achieve in Year 6 has caused her to reflect on how much more quickly her own pupils could learn.

The impact of the school's determination to raise achievement can be seen in improvements in the GCSE examinations in 2014. The proportion of students who achieved five GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, and results in students eight best subjects rose to significantly above average. Expected progress overall in English was also significantly above average and in line with the national expectation in mathematics. However, given the high attainment of most students when they enter the school, the proportion of those who made better than expected progress was still not good enough and gaps in attainment for disadvantaged students were still too wide.

You have put in place potentially effective new plans and even more robust tracking systems to accelerate the progress of other key student groups who underachieved in 2014: boys, children looked after by the LA, the most able students and a small number of students who have a disability or special educational needs. It will be critical to ensure that all teachers use the school's abundant information about the progress of students, right from Year 7 through to Year 9, as effectively as at Key Stage 4.

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 is providing strong support for the school, through an external consultant to provide quality assurance of the school's work. The local authority has also helped to organise links with local good and outstanding schools for the sharing of good practice and this has had apposite impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools