

22 April 2015

Mr Robert Hewitt
Headteacher
West Hill School
Thompson Cross
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Dear Mr Hewitt

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to West Hill School, Tameside

Following my visit to your school on 21 April 2015, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 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:

- ensure that the achievement gap between disadvantaged students, and their peers is narrowed as quickly as possible
- ensure that all staff are challenging the most able students in order for them to make the best possible progress
- provide more access to a range of books to help promote reading across the school.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and other senior and middle leaders; the Chair and another member of the Governing Body; a representative from the local authority and two groups of students. I evaluated the school action plan and scrutinised other key documentation. I also had the opportunity to accompany two deputy headteachers on a tour of the school.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed and he will take up his position at the start of September. A new Head of English will take up her post at the start of May.

Main findings

Following the inspection in December 2013, you and your staff wasted no time setting about eradicating the inadequacies identified. The inspection a year later acknowledged the distance you had travelled in a short period of time. During the spring term you have continued on this path, with leaders throughout the school focusing on the areas of improvement identified in the recent report. During my visit, senior leaders provided details of the actions taken and evidence of their impact to date. This information complements a clear and succinct action plan.

The leadership of teaching and learning is strong and much has been done to build on the improvements already made in this area. Senior leaders triangulate a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers are supported to improve their practice through whole school and personalised training. During my visit, I saw details of how you use teaching support plans where necessary to bring about improvements in classroom practice. Comments made by some of the students I spoke to, show that this is making a difference to their learning. They feel that since January, their teachers are explaining things more effectively, and that their work is more challenging, which is a good thing. As one Key Stage 3 boy said, 'teachers are spending more time with us.' Further evidence of this impact came when another said confidently, 'my levels have gone up since January.' However, most of the Key Stage 3 students in the discussion said they were not enjoying their learning in their Religious Education lessons, and did not think they were making good progress in this subject.

Students enjoy receiving feedback from their teachers on a more frequent basis than before. They value the time they are given in lessons to respond to this feedback and can articulate how they feel this is helping them to make progress. A work scrutiny revealed examples where teachers were marking work very effectively, for example in the English book of a high ability Year 9 boy. In this example, the feedback was pushing the student on to reach the highest levels. However, your own monitoring shows that this is not consistent across the school. There is still work to be done to eradicate this variability in marking and the expectations which teachers have of their students.

Strategies to improve literacy across the school are very effectively co-ordinated. All classrooms display the literacy marking policy; it can also be found in students' books and teachers' planners. One student told me that writing out spelling corrections three times, helps him to memorise them. There is a clear philosophy that literacy is everyone's responsibility and this is supported by a termly meeting for all departmental literacy leads, where good practice is shared. Students say that they find the humanities and science department writing mats very helpful, particularly when doing extended writing. The literacy co-ordinator carries out a systematic and thorough department audit, and gives clear recommendations and advice for further improvement. Although students are encouraged to read for pleasure, the success of this is limited as the school does not provide sufficient access to a range of books.

You and your senior leaders have shifted the culture so that all staff are now focused on every student making the best possible progress. Current predictions, based on externally moderated work, indicate that Year 11 students' attainment and progress in English will be much improved on last year. Students achieved well in mathematics last year and this upward trend is set to continue. Achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students nationally, are predicted to narrow, but you are aware that there is still work to be done here. You are also aware of how important it is that all staff are challenging the most able students in order for them to attain the highest grades.

An understanding of British values is promoted effectively through a range of subjects across the curriculum and through the assembly programme. The local Prevent engagement officer has provided training for the whole staff.

Governance was judged to be strong at the last inspection, and this continues to be the case. Governors are very proactive and are already planning for the future by looking at how best to organise their committees in order to provide the most effective challenge to take the school on the next step of its improvement journey. Much of their time over the last term has been taken up with a rigorous selection procedure to appoint a new headteacher. In order to further strengthen their own capacity, they have externally recruited three new governors, who bring a range of relevant expertise.

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 school has a strong relationship with the local authority. The Head of School Performance and Standards has a real understanding of its issues and you value his support and challenge. The local authority strategic lead for English has worked closely with the department which has contributed to the improved achievement of students in this subject. The literacy co-ordinator has also taken advantage of her support and local authority resources.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne

Her Majesty's Inspector