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13 November 2014

Mrs Amanda Ryan
Headteacher
Hillside High School
Breeze Hill
Bootle
Merseyside
L20 9NU

Dear Mrs Ryan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hillside High School

Following my visit with Judith Tolley and Stephen Rowland, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 11 and 12 November 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs) before the next monitoring inspection subject to a rigorous programme of induction and support being put into place with the aim of helping such NQTs to become at least good teachers. I will review these arrangements with you at each monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the Director of Young People and Families for Sefton.

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2013

- Improve teaching so that it is all good or better by ensuring that all teachers:
 - check students' understanding in lessons and adapt the activity if it is too hard or too easy
 - use the detailed information on students' prior attainment to set more demanding work for all groups of students
 - always insist on high standards of work
 - when marking students' work, tell them exactly how to improve their work and subsequently check that students are responding to the comments
 - provide activities that involve and inspire students to do their best
 - ensure teaching assistants are deployed more effectively and that they make a greater contribution to the progress of lower-attaining students.

- Improve students' progress in order to raise attainment to at least national averages, particularly in English and mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - boys make accelerated progress
 - the presentation of boys' written work is improved
 - a review of the practice of early entry for GCSE mathematics examinations is undertaken
 - the attainment gap between those students who are supported through pupil premium funding and those who are not eligible is closed more quickly.

- Raise levels of attendance to above average by ensuring that:
 - steps are taken to reduce persistent absence substantially
 - students are encouraged to be punctual to school and to lessons
 - students on the alternative provision always attend their work placements.

- Ensure that leadership, management and governance are effective in improving students' achievement by ensuring that:
 - school and subject improvement plans are more sharply focused on improving teaching and students' achievement
 - targets for school improvement are far more challenging
 - leaders at all levels have the skills and understanding needed to drive forward rapid improvement
 - teaching is monitored far more rigorously and that quality assurance by senior leaders is accurate
 - the inadequate teaching is dealt with
 - leaders at all levels have a good understanding of the performance of the school.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 11 to 12 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher; members of the school's leadership team; 13 students; seven members of the IEB, including the Chair; and two representatives of the local authority.

Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching and learning since September 2014. They spent between 20 and 45 minutes in each of 14 classes. During this time inspectors observed the teaching and learning in the lessons taught, spoke with students, looked at the information held by teachers about the progress of students within the classes and examined work in students' books. The majority of this inspection activity was conducted jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team.

Inspectors also took into account 40 responses received from parents on Ofsted's portal for parents, Parent View.

Context

The most significant changes since the monitoring inspection of February 2014 have been in the mathematics department. Of the 10 members of this department, six, including the head of department, are new to the school.

The arrangements for teaching English and mathematics have been reviewed. From September 2014, classes in these subjects contain no more than 17 students.

Achievement of pupils at the school

GCSE results in 2014 in terms of the percentage of students gaining five grades A* to C, including mathematics and English, were disappointing. These represent a decline from 2013. The reason behind this decline was the performance of students in mathematics. Because, as outlined in the February monitoring inspection report, the department was inexperienced and students were not getting enough opportunities to solve problems, results in this subject dipped. This dip also had a negative impact on the proportion of students for whom the pupil premium (additional government money) is intended. The percentage of these students gaining five grades A* to C, including mathematics and English, also declined from the 2013 figures.

While these results were disappointing, some subjects improved. In English, for example, provisional figures show 76% of students made at least expected progress. A number of subjects had students gaining A* to C at a level higher than that found

nationally. These included English, resistant materials, core science, biology, chemistry, physics, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, media and drama.

It is no surprise to see science subjects continuing to do well. Students in these subjects continue to make some of the best rates of progress in the school. The reason for this is simple: some of the strongest teaching and leadership in the school exists within this department.

Work in students' books and files show that, while they are continuing to make progress in their learning, there is still variability across the school, including within subjects. Where progress is best, in science and languages, for example, teachers routinely identify well the needs of different groups of students, those who have special educational needs or who are more able. The picture of students' progress in mathematics is not as strong. Even though students may answer correctly, a lack of challenge in teaching and marking within some classes means that within just a few weeks some students cannot explain their responses.

The quality of teaching

The improvement in teaching quality reported in February 2014 continues. Leaders are accurate in their evaluation that the quality remains inconsistent. Where the quality is strongest, expectations of what students are to do and learn are routinely high. In addition, the questions asked by teachers and other adults check regularly students' understanding of what is being taught. Furthermore, students are expected to respond to written comments and challenges through their use of the 'purple pen'. The result is that students consistently make gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Students studying science in Year 11, for example, explain their thinking lesson by lesson so their spoken and written work includes responses, such as, 'The droplets will have a bigger surface area for the lipase to work; as a result, the enzyme can work quicker.'

Teachers' use of information about different groups of students, captured well in succinct class profiles, is inconsistent but improving. In the main, teachers are using this information to plan meaningful activities. They then ensure such activities take place and in lessons check the progress students are making. Generally, students, regardless of ability or need, are making gains in their learning, although this is dependent on the subject taught. Leaders are correct in their view that they should ensure these features are consistently applied to avoid, for example, more able students being identified but not catered for in teaching.

Marking is variable in quality. Where most effective, in science, for example, sharply focused marking identifies what students have done well and identifies clearly how they can improve, including through the setting of additional challenges. Such quality regularly challenges students to think deeply, develop subject terminology

and make links with other subjects, mathematics, for example. In English, marking provides a clear commentary for students to consider the gains they have made in their learning. However, it does not routinely give guidance on how improvements can be attained. In mathematics, marking does not always identify students' misunderstandings. This is a contributory factor to why the progress students make in mathematics is not as strong as in other subjects. Leaders are correct in their view that a more consistent approach to marking is required, particularly as this is a previously agreed non-negotiable. Furthermore, leaders recognise the potential consistently good marking has to ensure that the learning of different groups of students is as good in all subjects as it is in those who routinely mark well.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Once again, students conducted themselves very well both in lessons and around school. Throughout the monitoring inspection they were polite and well-mannered, including with teachers they were not familiar with. A number of students studying performing arts took part in a series of presentations, 'Hillside Remembers', to parents, governors and fellow students. These presentations were moving and enabled students and adults to reflect deeply on war, conflict, remembrance, reconciliation and peace. In the presentation attended by inspectors, the silence and rapt attention of the audience demonstrated well the very strong relationships and mutual respect between students and adults that exist in this school.

Students spoken with were positive about behaviour in school and confident they could speak with adults, the headteacher, for example, if they had concerns. In walking around the whole school, inspectors again noted a calm, orderly environment with no students out of class unless for good reason. The silence at 11am on Remembrance Day was observed impeccably.

The attendance of students continues to improve, as does the attendance of the decreasing number who are persistently absent. Overall attendance rates at the end of 2013/4 stood at 94.2%, a 1.6% rise on the previous year. Current attendance rates stand at 94.4%, a further increase. Absence rates for those students persistently absent fell sharply from 10.4% to 6.8% over the same period. The attendance of students attending alternative curriculum arrangements is lower than the overall school figure. Nevertheless, this masks a mixed picture, including great successes. While leaders are checking closely the attendance of a few students whose attendance is a concern, there are some students who have 100% attendance.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders and members of the IEB continue to identify the right areas for improvement. The IEB continues to hold leaders to account and makes use of a

range of information, including that from the local authority, to inform its discussions and questions. As a result, capacity continues to grow.

Against a backdrop of considerable change in the mathematics department and disappointing GCSE results, leaders have not lost heart. The headteacher, for example, continues to drive the school forward with determination and, assisted by her deputies and senior leaders, set challenging targets for improvement. The programme of professional development for staff is equipping them increasingly well to meet the challenges of keeping improvements moving at a pace. Leaders, quite rightly, recognise one way of ensuring greater consistency is to consider refining the number of priorities so that staff focus on one or two areas, the meeting of the different needs of students, for example.

Quite correctly, IEB members and school leaders see the need for improvement in mathematics as paramount. To this end, the newly appointed head of mathematics has injected a much needed consistency of approach into the department. However, the impact of these measures on ensuring better teaching and outcomes for students is not yet evident. The key factor why this is so is the lack of robustness in the department's records that review teaching quality and students' work. They do not always articulate the learning of students or refer to anything mathematical. This lack of robustness is not unique to the mathematics department. Senior leaders are correct in their view that more regular checks need to be made to ensure monitoring records are accurate by being grounded in evidence that highlights the gains made by students in their learning. By contrast, other records, those for NQTs, for example, were responding to the priority set by the previous monitoring inspection to make clear the impact of teaching on learning. In addition, leaders who observed teaching and carried out scrutinies of work jointly with inspectors identified exactly the right strengths and areas for improvement. They also fed back their findings to teachers very clearly. Furthermore, some leaders, of science, technology, languages and English, for example, were very clear about the impact of the actions they had taken.

The school's provision for students with special educational needs is improving. The register of students with such needs has been re-evaluated and, as a consequence, reduced in size. The results are generally higher expectations and support targeted to students who need it most. A stronger feature of the school's work is the setting up of a 'reasonable adjustments register'. This has made clear to staff particular needs of students that can be met in day-to-day teaching, for example the use of specific resources. Under the leadership of a deputy headteacher, the school is also reviewing how effectively pupil premium funding (additional government money) is being used.

External support

The local authority continues to have an accurate view of the school. Its own regular monitoring has, for example, identified the inconsistencies found by inspectors. Consequently, it is able to challenge and support leaders and the IEB to ensure that the school continues to make progress.