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Mr Trevor Harding
Headteacher
Belper School and Sixth Form Centre
John O'Gaunts Way
Off Kilburn Road
Belper
DE56 0DA

Dear Mr Harding

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Belper School and Sixth Form Centre, Derbyshire local authority.

Following my visit to your school on 8 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you, the headteacher designate, members of the senior leadership team, members of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. I evaluated the school improvement plan and a range of school documentation. This included the school self-evaluation form, data relating to pupils' attainment and progress as well as minutes of recent governing body meetings. You took me on a tour of the school and we made brief visits to a range of classes.

Context

In September 2012 the current headteacher gave notice that he would retire at the end of the academic year. Following that, and just before the recent inspection, a new headteacher had been appointed and will take up post in September 2013.

Since the inspection in January 2013, the head of English has resigned his post and will be leaving at the end of the summer term. A recruitment process is underway to appoint a suitable replacement for September 2013.

Main findings

Leaders and managers, including governors, and staff have accepted the findings from the inspection in January. They understand that there are three important things to accomplish: ensure that teaching in the vast majority of lessons is good or better; ensure that students make good or better progress in all their subjects; and ensure that all subjects perform as well as each other in the main school and in the sixth form.

Following the recent inspection, a plan has been constructed to take into account the two main areas that were identified for improvement. The actions described in this plan are vague, imprecise and are not sufficient to bring about the improvements needed. Furthermore, the plan lacks clear and measurable success criteria which are necessary for school leaders and governors to measure the progress being made in tackling the two priority areas.

The school is in a hiatus between your own departure and the arrival of the new headteacher. Much time and effort has gone into developing a whole school tracking system to be used by teachers to monitor the academic progress of students and to plan lessons more effectively. However, very little has happened to improve the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. Too much store is being placed on a single staff training day in June to remedy this. There is too much emphasis on providing intervention work to help students catch up outside of lessons and not enough emphasis on accelerating rates of progress in lessons. Governors are aware of this situation and are keen to remedy this as soon as possible.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- revise and sharpen the improvement plan to include all the key actions needed to become good, linked to measurable success criteria
- adjust the local authority support plan to take into account any additional help that may be required in the light of these revisions
- maintain a tight focus on accelerating the pace and progress of students in all lessons
- maintain a tight focus on evaluating learning when observing lessons
- plan a realistic and constructive programme of induction for the new headteacher to ensure a smooth transition and handover at the end of the summer term.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. I intend to return to the school early next term to check the revised plans. I will also check on the progress that the school has made in moving towards its targets for teaching and achievement. I will then report to the full governing body on my view of the plan, the progress that the school is making and on the next steps needed to move the school forward.

External support

The school receives useful support from the local authority senior adviser. The school has been identified by the local authority as a school causing concern and requiring additional support. A plan is in place to support the school to become a good school within a two-year time frame, but this plan does not mesh with the school improvement plan. A programme of support activities has been set up involving the use of advisers and consultants, but this is yet to be fully implemented. The senior adviser and deputy director of children's services meet with school leaders every month to check on the progress that the school is making and a summary report is sent to you afterwards. However, this report is not shared with the governing body. This external monitoring and feedback will be central in securing the confidence of senior leaders and the governing body to lead the school forward in the future.

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

Yours sincerely

Trevor Riddiough
Her Majesty's Inspector