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7 June 2013

Mr W Carr
Headteacher
Ralph Thoresby School
Holtdale Approach
Adel
Leeds
LS16 7RX

Dear Mr Carr

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Ralph Thoresby School

Following my visit to your school on 6 June 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. A tour of the school was also undertaken that included brief visits to lessons. The school improvement plan and various monitoring and evaluation documents were also scrutinised.

Context

There have been no significant changes in the school's organisation since the inspection.

Main findings

The school accepted the inspection judgements and is moving forward. The new headteacher was aware of the key issues well before the inspection and had introduced a number of carefully planned strategies to bring about improvements but they had not had time to have sufficient impact. Leaders at all levels are clear about the reasons for the inspection judgements and are very keen to get on with taking the school to good. Since the inspection, the school improvement plan has been revised to focus on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection while retaining other priorities alongside. The improvement plan is transparent and succinct and includes clear targets and responsibilities. The latest self-evaluation report, measuring progress since the inspection, evidences marked improvements since March. It also highlights any areas that require further attention, such as the need to increase the proportion of students making better than average progress.

The latest internal data shows that the upward trend in achievement, demonstrated by the 2010 and 2011 results, is back on track after the dip in 2012. Student target-setting and tracking are much more robust and students and parents are kept more closely informed about progress. Teachers also receive more user-friendly data reports that are used to inform their teaching and to target interventions more precisely. Students in Key Stage 4 are taking fewer options, allowing more time to maximise achievement in English and mathematics. New literacy and numeracy initiatives lower down the school are also contributing to accelerating progress in English and mathematics. More robust quality assurance of the off-site provision is leading to further improvements in achievement. As part of the drive to take the school to good and beyond, leaders have sought help from a school in the north-west with a similar intake of students and outstanding achievement. Proven strategies are being adapted and introduced.

Teaching has improved considerably over this year and the improvement has continued since the inspection. Systems for improving and monitoring the quality of teaching are rigorous and have been enhanced further. This term, peer observations are being used very effectively to share best practice and subject leaders are playing a much greater role in developing the skills of their teams. Subject leaders have been trained to observe lessons and are working alongside experienced observers to provide feedback and support to teachers on their individual priorities for development. Subject leaders have also produced subject specific marking policies and will monitor their implementation and effectiveness through regular audits of students' books.

Much effective work has been done to reduce student absence. The promotion of good attendance has been given a very high priority across the school. Attendance statistics are being used much more effectively and data are analysed more incisively in order to spot patterns of absence and take action swiftly. The Safer Schools Partnership Officer has taken on the additional role of following up persistent absentees out in the community and is having an impact. Attendance rates have improved in the weeks since the inspection, at a time when they would have declined in previous years, and girls' attendance is no longer a concern. New initiatives to improve punctuality have been introduced and are proving effective.

The headteacher is a very strong and effective leader. He has made many necessary changes since joining the school in September and taken tough decisions but has also motivated staff and lifted morale. He continues to spearhead improvements and raise the aspirations of both staff and students. The senior leadership team is going from strength to strength. Members of the team operate well together with very experienced and capable leaders working alongside others who are growing into their roles. The biggest improvement since the inspection, however, is among middle leaders who are taking increasing responsibility for driving the school forward. Plans to improve numeracy development across the school are underway. An audit has been completed, learning materials for use in mentor time have been produced and attendance data are already being used to develop and apply numeracy skills. As well as focusing inwardly on addressing the areas for improvement, leaders are building effective external links. For example, links with businesses are providing an increasing number of real life experiences for students. Governance is strong, effective and improving. Governors are very well informed, have effective links with key staff in school and are keen to play their part in moving the school to good and beyond. They have the skills and knowledge that enable them to challenge senior leaders as well as offer strong support.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

HMI recommend that:

- Plans to improve the quality of marking and the development of numeracy across the curriculum are fully implemented and embedded
- The drive to improve achievement continues at pace resulting in more students making better than average progress.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school is receiving outstanding support from the local authority. The amount of support offered has been well-judged and matched to the needs of the school. The local authority led review in September gave a realistic assessment of the school's position and made staff aware of the task ahead. The headteacher also receives valuable support from an experienced and successful headteacher from a neighbouring local authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett

Her Majesty's Inspector