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6 February 2014

Mrs C Robinson
Principal
The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre
Goldthorpe Road
Goldthorpe
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
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Dear Mrs Robinson

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre

Following my visit with Tanya Harber Stuart, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 5 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 most recent monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged as having serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in June 2013. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families for Barnsley.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Lane

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to at least good so that students are able to make consistently good progress and attainment rises in all subjects, by:
 - making certain that teachers use information about students' capabilities effectively so that students are given appropriately challenging work that interests and engages them in lessons
 - ensuring that teachers' expectations of students' capabilities are high
 - ensuring that teachers use questioning more effectively to check students' understanding and challenge their thinking
 - ensuring that marking and teachers' feedback to students help them understand how to improve their work and take the next steps towards meeting their targets
 - developing students' study skills so that they can work independently in lessons and be less reliant on guidance from the teacher.

- Leaders at all levels must take responsibility for moving the school forward by ensuring that:
 - those leaders who require help to fulfil their roles effectively have the skills needed to monitor and evaluate their area robustly
 - all staff take responsibility for improving students' literacy and numeracy skills
 - all staff demonstrate a consistent approach towards implementing whole-school policies.

- Insist that regular attendance from all students is the norm, by:
 - monitoring trends in the attendance of individuals and groups of students
 - working closely with students and families to overcome the barriers to full attendance.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 5 February 2014

Evidence

The inspectors met with the Principal, other senior leaders, members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. Documents provided by the school were evaluated. One tutor time and 17 parts of lessons were observed during the inspection. All of these observations were carried out jointly with school leaders. The lesson observations focused on the quality of teaching and learning, especially in the core subjects, and the impact of new school policies in the classroom.

Context

The planned academy conversion is now unlikely to take place on 1 April 2014 as a result of negotiations about the building contract.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders are taking effective action to improve the education provided. The sound judgements made by senior leaders about teaching and learning were confirmed during this inspection and local authority reviews. Senior leaders' feedback to teachers is accurate and precise. Middle leadership is improving. Heads of faculty have been trained in conducting lesson observation and undertake weekly learning walks in lessons which they evaluate at meetings with senior leaders. Middle leaders are more accountable for teaching and learning and progress in their subject areas. As part of a rolling programme some heads of faculty have undertaken specific subject reviews and reported their findings to the governors' strategy group.

Judgements made by senior leaders, which are supported by two reviews carried out by the local authority, show that more than two thirds of teaching and learning is regularly good or better. A comprehensive training programme is in place to develop teaching and learning. During this inspection improved teaching and learning was seen in English lessons. Work was challenging and well-planned, so it met the needs of students. High expectations of behaviour and the quantity of work to be completed mean students make rapid progress. However, in some other teaching observed, particularly in mathematics, expectations are not high enough and planning for different students' needs is not having the desired impact. Teachers are beginning to include literacy and numeracy in lessons, but practice is patchy.

There is still too much questioning which does not check students' understanding or challenge their thinking and learning. For example, too frequently one-word answers are accepted by teachers as sufficient in some mathematics and science lessons. In English lessons challenging questions, relating to the examination criteria, give students a deeper understanding of their work. In a science lesson where students benefitted from outstanding teaching, they wrote their own searching questions which were answered by another classmate. The questions were then marked by the student who had written them. This challenged students and extended their learning highly effectively.

Marking and feedback are improving. In some lessons responding to teachers' feedback is a well-established part of the learning and the school's marking and feedback policy is used to enhance students' understanding and help them improve their work. However, the quality and quantity of marking are still inconsistent and students are not always given helpful feedback.

In the lessons observed where students made better learning they developed their study skills well and supported each other to make rapid progress. However, the tutor-time activities designed to improve study skills, literacy and numeracy are not having the desired impact.

Improvements in teaching and learning are resulting in better progress. School data show attainment is rising with more students in Year 11 on track for five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. The proportion of students attaining a grade C or better in English and mathematics and making expected progress is also increasing. Gaps in achievement between boys and girls and students who are supported by the pupil premium funding and those who do not are closing. The gaps in English are larger, but are closing at a greater rate than those in mathematics as a result of better teaching. Key Stage 3 students are making better progress. Reading ages are improving for the majority of students in the reading support programme.

The behaviour policy is having a positive impact with rewards and praise evident in the better lessons. There is low-level disruptive behaviour where teaching and learning are less than good. Attendance has improved and persistent absence has reduced because of the very high profile of good attendance in the school and effective monitoring systems.

Governors monitor the impact of actions taken to improve the school through monthly strategy group meetings. These meetings are also attended by representatives of the local authority and the proposed sponsor. The strategy group holds both senior and middle leaders to account effectively.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Senior leaders are astute and know what needs to be done to improve the school.
- Middle leaders are increasingly effective and are developing the skills needed to monitor and evaluate their area robustly.
- Teaching and learning are improving, particularly in English where rapid improvement is leading to better progress.
- There are strong improvements in attendance.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- In some lessons there is not enough challenge, expectations are low, questioning is undemanding and the pace is slow. Consequently, students do not make enough progress, particularly in mathematics.
- The marking and feedback policy is not yet being used consistently well to help students make better progress.

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective and regular support. Local authority representatives have conducted two comprehensive reviews of the school's work to monitor the impact of actions taken to improve the school. The authority has also brokered the support of a National Support School. The Principal meets with the headteacher of the National Support School to broker additional capacity. Colleagues from the National Support School are supporting middle leaders in the development of their roles and contributing to improvements in teaching and learning through support for individual teachers.