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Mr S Davies
Headteacher
Stocksbridge High School
Shay House Lane
Stocksbridge
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S36 1FD

Dear Mr Davies

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stocksbridge High School, Sheffield

Following my visit to your school on 12 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 March 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:

- Close gaps in students' progress so that it accelerates at the same rate in all subjects, and raise standards so that they are consistently well above national age-related expectations, which is what students are invariably capable of.

Evidence

During my visit, I met with you, several senior and middle leaders, two governors, a local authority (LA) officer, and the National Leader of Education (NLE) mentoring you. I spoke to pupils and teachers about their work. I studied attendance, progress and behaviour data, action plans and monitoring records of teaching. I visited 14 classes, and examined pupils' books and folders. I also read reviews by your School Improvement Partner (SIP).

Context

Since the section 5 inspection several teachers have left the school including the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). Replacements have been appointed in each case. The senior leadership team has been reorganised and expanded.

Main findings

The school has made a start in addressing the issues that have seen pupils fail to achieve as highly as they could. However, the school's leaders are experienced enough to know that it will not be a 'quick fix' and that their improvement strategies need to have substantial further impact going forward if the school is to get to good within the prescribed timescales.

Leaders are putting some firm foundations in place to help to ensure students can make sustained progress and achieve highly as a matter of course. Morale is high. Staff at all levels are being empowered to lead learning, monitor, evaluate and improve their impact on students' progress within delegated boundaries. Staff accountability is high and mediocre or poor performance is tackled robustly. Timely and bespoke interventions are aiding more effective identification and support for students at risk, or already falling behind. Target-setting and assessment are accurate and used more effectively to plan students' learning.

Inspection evidence, 2014 examination results and the school's latest progress data show a mixed picture in terms of students' achievement. Students in all years, including the more-able, those with special educational needs and those eligible for pupil premium need to consistently make greater gains in learning in all their subjects, especially mathematics, technology subjects, English language, modern foreign languages religious studies and core science.

It is clear from observing lessons; examining students' books and talking to staff and students that staff are taking on board the training to increase their impact. They are ensuring learning outcomes are explicit. Mostly, learning activities are suitably engaging and challenging, including for the most able and boys. Students are being provided with some high-quality feedback on how to improve their work but this is not yet the norm across the school. The same is true of the extent to which staff assure themselves during lessons that students have made good or better progress. Students' thirst for learning and active participation in lessons is not always evident. At times this is linked to uninspiring teaching.

Attendance and persistent absence levels are broadly average overall, but there are specific year and group issues which need resolving. Staff must tackle more effectively the small group of repeat offenders who behave unacceptably, and reduce the need for internal exclusion.

Fuller information and training to better interpret what they receive means governors are starting to offer more of the robust challenge and support to the school their role demands. The school's action plans are mostly sound. However, they must ensure they have suitable milestones that allow them to objectively gauge their progress in tackling each key priority.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. In the meantime, the school should email a termly progress report to me.

External support

The school is receiving invaluable support to develop strategic leadership, teaching and management from Notre Dame High School and its headteacher who is an NLE. Frank appraisal from their SIP and advice and guidance from the LA is helping students' progress.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Interim Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families for Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

John Young

Her Majesty's Inspector