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Mr Scott Burnside
Headteacher
Chaucer School
Wordsworth Avenue
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S5 8NH

Dear Mr Burnside

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Chaucer School, Sheffield

Following my visit to your school on 24 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 June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- increase the impact of strategies to improve students' achievement, attendance and behaviour, and iron out the inconsistencies in the impact of teaching and leadership on students' learning and progress.

Evidence

During my visit, I met with you, several senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chief Executive of the Sponsor, who is a National Leader of Education (NLE), to discuss actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke to teachers and students about their work, and I scrutinised action plans and monitoring records of teaching and performance management. I also considered attendance, behaviour and progress data. I visited 17 lessons, examined students' books and folders, and visited the isolation room.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection several teachers have left the school. Replacements have been appointed in each case. The leadership team has been restructured and extended.

Main findings

There is a collective ambition and clarity of purpose that permeates the academy. However, the academy's leaders are pragmatic enough to recognise the magnitude of the task they face to get the school to good within the prescribed timescales. Modest and inconsistent indicators of improvement in the school's work are apparent.

Leadership has been reorganised and distributed more widely and staff feel empowered to drive improvement in their respective areas. Systems for assessing, monitoring, evaluating and supporting the improvement of staff performance are rigorous and showing initial signs of driving up quality and standards in both delivery, and outcomes for students. The bar is being raised in terms of expectations and a coaching and training model is being used to help underpin the successful implementation of the academy's strategic improvement plan.

It is clear from observing lessons, examining students' books and talking to them and their teachers that there is a focus on raising student aspirations and staff expectations of what students are capable of. I saw examples where these aims dovetailed well and students' learning and progress was very effective. However, this was counter-balanced by less successful examples where students' achievement was inhibited by: a lack of engagement; weak marking and feedback; work that was too easy and/or not progressively challenging; and time being wasted because students were not clear about what was expected of them.

Attendance, persistent absence and truancy levels remain significant challenges for the academy, although there has been pleasing improvement so far this term. The same is true of the volumes of exclusions, and referrals to the isolation room. However, there remains significant room for further improvement. Students were courteous and disciplined on the whole, suggesting some early impact of the behaviour improvement strategies in place.

Inspection evidence, 2014 examination results and the academy's latest progress data show some unevenness in terms of students' achievement in subjects and Key Stages. Mathematics, humanities, languages and science, remain weaker performing subjects at Key Stage 4 with major improvement a non-negotiable for 2015. The picture is better in Key Stage 3 but the big challenge for the academy is to ensure everyone, especially disadvantaged students, who currently lag behind, consistently make good or better progress in every subject.

Governors are well-qualified to strategically influence, challenge and support the academy's improvement and do so shrewdly. Their ambition is tempered by a realism and recognition the academy's journey to good is in its infancy. Academy action plans are fit for purpose.

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

External support

The academy receives high quality support, guidance and advice which is helping it to increase the efficiency and impact of its leadership, teaching and student support services, from the Tapton School Academy Trust. The chief executive has been highly influential in facilitating the conditions in which students can thrive and achieve well.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Interim Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, Sheffield and the DfE - Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector