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Mrs Julie Richardson
Headteacher
Beacon Hill Community School
Market Square
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Cumbria
CA7 3EZ

Dear Mrs Richardson

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Beacon Hill Community School

Following my visit to your school on 7 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. 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 section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, subject leaders, representatives of the governing body, including the Chair, and two representatives of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated. I toured the school during lessons and spoke with students informally and during a meeting at lunch-time. I looked at a small sample of students' work.

Context

Since the previous inspection, five staff have left the school and five new specialist teachers have been appointed in mathematics, science, English, food technology and physical education. The science appointee is also the new head of science. There is

supply cover in art and for the special educational needs coordinator. Teaching has been reorganised at Key Stage 3.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You have responded swiftly to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Staff and governors are fully committed to making changes and to quickening students' progress. The local authority's statement of action and your school improvement plans are well written. They detail appropriate actions to secure improvement and have clear criteria to measure success in raising students' achievement. Your self-evaluation is rigorous and provides a secure base on which to build improvements. Subject leaders have produced similarly effective self-evaluations and action plans for English, mathematics and science. The core subject leaders are developing their leadership skills well alongside senior leaders and with local authority support. You have quickly addressed weaknesses in science with the appointment of a specialist head of department.

Your reorganisation of the senior leadership team makes best use of expertise. You have ensured that professional development is focused on areas for improvement and have drawn on external support effectively. The local authority is providing good support, which is valued by staff and governors. They are supporting further links with schools in the area and with local leaders in education, to enable the sharing of ideas and best practice.

You have quickly improved systems to track students' progress, taking account of their starting points. The new system ensures that leaders and teachers can check each student's progress in every year group in English, mathematics and science. You have set challenging targets giving teachers and governors a much clearer understanding of the progress students should be making. The system enables students who are not making expected progress to be identified early so that additional support can be provided.

Quality whole-class teaching rightly remains a key focus. Marking is now consistent across the school and students say they find it helpful. The reorganisation of teaching into ability groups across Years 7 and 8 and 'pre-GCSE' teaching groups in Year 9 ensures that students who have special needs or are falling behind are taught in smaller groups. It is not possible to measure the impact of new arrangements at this early stage. However, leaders recognise the need to check that all groups, including those in nurture or support groups, make progress that is comparable with national expectations from their starting points. Results in GCSE in 2014 show an improving trend in achievement, particularly in mathematics.

The previous inspection indicated that governors 'provide good support and challenge to the school' and inspectors did not recommend any further action for governors. They have a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the school's performance based on a full programme of monitoring.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's improvement plans are fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law
Her Majesty's Inspector