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Mr David Hudson
Executive Headteacher
Clifton Community School
Middle Lane
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Hudson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Clifton Community School

Following my visit to your school on 2 December 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the associate headteacher, the head of school and other senior leaders, the attendance officer, five members of the governing body, including the Chair and the vice-chair, and representatives of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's plans for improvement were evaluated.

Context

Leadership arrangements established immediately prior to the section 5 inspection remain in place. A new leader has been appointed to lead on personal, social, health and religious education. Four more teachers will leave the school at the end of this term. A new Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body have been appointed. The governing body has reconstituted, reduced in size and established a new committee structure.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since the recent inspection, the newly established senior leadership team has begun to have a positive impact. The executive headteacher is now taking a more prominent strategic lead, supported by a number of senior and middle leaders seconded from schools in the Wickersley Multi Academy Trust. Senior leaders have quickly assessed what needs to be done to address the areas for improvement and are driving change at a brisk pace. Steps have been taken to raise expectations of staff, students and parents and these are beginning to have an impact.

Leaders have prioritised the need to ensure students' progress is accurately assessed and that data are better used to support planning of lessons and targeting of additional support for particular students. Training on the use of data has been provided and teachers are working closely with colleagues from the support school to strengthen their planning. Leaders report more lessons are now pitched appropriately and challenge students more effectively. Leaders are also confident that assessments are now accurate. These assessments suggest the proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics will rise next summer.

The new curriculum introduced last January is meeting the needs of students more effectively. Senior leaders have recognised the need to adjust the curriculum further and will introduce more changes from January 2015. These changes will include more time for personal, social, health and religious education for students in Key Stage 3. A new leader has been appointed to develop this aspect of the school's work, central to which will be a focus on helping students to understand risks to their safety and well-being better. The curriculum also places more emphasis on English and mathematics. At Key Stage 3, additional time has been added to support students with special educational needs and those who enter the school with levels of attainment below expectations. As yet, this support is more successful in mathematics than in English.

Since the inspection, there has been a much stronger focus on training and the professional development of teachers. Current priorities are focused on using data to inform lesson planning, improving the quality of marking and feedback, and managing behaviour consistently. Support for teachers new to the school, including those who are newly qualified, is well coordinated and benefits from access to the programme of support within the Wickersley Trust schools.

There are much higher expectations of middle leaders. A new faculty structure has been established and faculty leaders are working closely with their counterparts in the support school to develop their understanding of the role. Middle leaders are

now held accountable for student progress and the quality of teaching within their areas of responsibility.

Strategies to improve behaviour have begun to be implemented. Staff have all been trained on the new behaviour policy and efforts are being made to improve behaviour at social times and students' punctuality to lessons. Some students continue to challenge the school's expectations and, as a result, the number of exclusions remains high. A wide range of strategies are being used to improve attendance, including a rewards system for good attendance and the prosecution of families with the poorest attendance. However, the school's data show these strategies are yet to have an impact and attendance remains well below the national average.

The external review of governance and the review of the school's use of the pupil premium (additional government funding) have not yet taken place, but will be completed by the end of term. However, some actions to strengthen the impact of governance have happened. The governing body has reconstituted and restructured the work of its committees. Nevertheless, governors still do not systematically evaluate the progress the school is making or robustly hold leaders to account. Neither do they have sufficiently well-defined procedures to monitor the impact of the pupil premium or Year 7 catch-up funding. Some governors are accessing further training or mentoring, but there are still significant gaps in governors' ability to monitor the school's finances.

The school's plans for improvement include appropriate actions, but would be strengthened by clarifying when and how progress will be evaluated. In addition, the plans are not sufficiently long term and, consequently, it is not clear what actions will be taken to ensure improvements are fully embedded over time.

The local authority statement of action sets out the support to be provided from the support school. A local authority representative is making regular visits to check on the progress the school is making.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

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

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector