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Mrs Frances Johnston
Headteacher
Canon Lee School
Rawcliffe Drive
Clifton Without
York
North Yorkshire
YO30 6ZS

Dear Mrs Johnston

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Canon Lee School, York

Following my visit to your school on 10 December 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- Make sure that faculty leaders and teachers know what is expected of them.
- Quickly identify the barriers to learning and take speedy action to provide support to close the gaps in pupils' progress and attainment.
- Ensure that frequent checks by leaders at all levels enable systems and the practices detailed above to be implemented consistently.
- Ensure that timescales and success measures in school plans are clear and that the governing body has clear and prompt information about what is happening in the school to inform their decision making.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, other senior leaders, teachers, students and the governing body and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

Significant changes to staffing and leadership have taken place since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require improvement. Thirty three staff have left the school, including twenty four teachers and an assistant headteacher. Twenty teachers have joined the school to replace them, including five in September 2014. The headteacher has been absent and officially left the school in December and the deputy headteacher is now leading the school as acting headteacher. In October a consultant headteacher joined the school temporarily to provide additional leadership support. A new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed in the autumn term. The number of students on the school role has reduced to 577.

Main findings

The school leadership has not effectively tackled issues to improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement since the last monitoring visit. Frequent changes to systems and practices, combined with the high turnover of teachers and other staff, resulted in disruption to students' learning and progress. In discussions during this visit, students explained that they were given work that repeated rather than built upon their earlier learning. Checks on students' learning in lessons by senior and middle leaders has not been frequent or thorough enough to identify that progress was slowing and achievement had declined significantly in mathematics and English during the last twelve months. Less than half of Year 11 students reached the standards expected of them in 2014. Senior leaders, governors and staff accept that intervention should have taken place sooner. A far greater sense of urgency and focus from school leaders, including the governing body, is required if the school is to provide a good standard of education with all groups of students achieving well.

The local authority has made plain their concerns and their very clear intervention plan is explicit about what must improve. The revised school action plan that leaders have developed in response, seeks to establish systems to track the impact of the school's work so that underachieving students are promptly identified and supported. However, the timescales and success measures lack the clarity needed to enable leaders and governors to hold staff to account. The quality of information arising from monitoring and evaluation of the school's work that is provided to governors is not explained well enough to enable them to hold senior leaders to account. This situation needs to improve urgently so that governors can quickly grasp the key issues and understand where further actions are required.

Students are beginning to catch-up on work they missed last year in response to more settled staffing this term. Support is provided for those Year 11 students who are at risk of missing their targets. Gaps in the progress of some groups, particularly students who have special educational needs and disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, have widened over the past year and measures to address this and to support these students have yet to begin. Checks on the quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning are not fully established to the depth and with the consistency required to remedy this situation. Marking and feedback to guide students' next steps in learning remain inconsistent and these shortcomings have not been addressed quickly enough. Leaders have not made clear enough the expectations required of all staff and particularly subject heads in their role as middle leaders in this regard.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. HMI will return to the school next term to carry out a further monitoring visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to meet with the full governing body, to review teaching and the monitoring of its impact on students' learning.

External support

The substantial support that York City Council have commissioned in the form of the temporary deployment of an external consultant headteacher is providing much needed capacity to senior leadership and management. The local authority are keeping a close eye on the school's progress and are already taking steps to use the support of local schools in more focused ways to assist the next phase of Canon Lee School's development. In response to clear communication from the local authority governors know that they are accountable for the decisions they make to drive improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for York.

Yours sincerely

Gina White

Her Majesty's Inspector