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Mr David Hudson
Executive Headteacher
Clifton Community School
Middle Lane
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
S65 2SN

Dear Mr Hudson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Clifton Community School

Following my visit with Jane Willis, Additional Inspector and Steven Goldsmith, Additional Inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 March, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good and students progress well in all subjects in all year groups, particularly in English and mathematics by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve, and challenging and supporting all students to reach their full potential
 - improving the support for students with special educational needs, particularly to improve their literacy and writing skills
 - improving teachers' monitoring of students' progress and ensuring students know how to improve their work and learning
 - ensuring teachers make accurate assessments of students' learning and use these to inform the planning of their lessons to best meet students' needs
 - ensuring the provision for improving students' literacy and numeracy skills is at least consistently good across all subjects
 - ensuring all staff consistently follow the school's policies and procedures, particularly for managing behaviour, giving students feedback on their work and challenging all students to achieve their potential.

- Leaders and governors should take urgent and effective action to improve the safety and well-being of the students to:
 - improve students' behaviour, especially as they move around the school and at the start and end of the school day.
 - improve students' attendance and punctuality to school and at the off-site provision, through responding more rapidly and effectively to students' lateness and absence
 - make sure the school's personal, social and health curriculum enables students to be fully understanding of, and know how to avoid, potential risks to their personal safety and well-being.

- Improve the impact of the leadership, including governance, in raising the attainment and improving the progress of students by:
 - ensuring the pupil premium funding is spent effectively on supporting the disadvantaged students to achieve at least as well as students nationally and that the spending is monitored robustly
 - improving the impact of middle leaders, by holding them rigorously to account for students' progress and the quality of teaching students receive
 - ensuring the governing body fully understand how well students are performing so they can more rigorously challenge the school to improve
 - improving the skills and knowledge of governors, particularly in the monitoring of the school's finances as well as the quality of teaching, so that they can fulfil their statutory duties appropriately.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, head of school and other senior leaders, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, a group of middle leaders and groups of students. Twenty three part-lessons were observed, of which the majority were observed with senior leaders. Inspectors also made brief visits to other lessons and the school's off-site provision. The school's revised plans for improvement were evaluated.

Context

In December 2014 the local authority proposed different leadership arrangements for the school. These proposals were subsequently withdrawn. Consequently, the leadership arrangements that were in place at the time of the previous monitoring visit remain in place. Some more leaders from within the Wickersley Multi-Academy Trust are working in the school and some roles and responsibilities of leaders have been re-allocated. Three teachers left the school in December and some middle leaders will leave the school at Easter. A new subject leader for English has been appointed, but efforts to recruit a subject leader for mathematics have been unsuccessful. Three new governors have joined the governing body.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The quality of assessment in the school is improving as more stringent checks are now in place to check the accuracy of data. Senior leaders are now confident the data they hold on the progress of students in Key Stage 4 is accurate. However, senior leaders are less confident about the accuracy of assessments in Key Stage 3, as these continue to show wide variations in rates of progress across different subjects. The systematic assessment of students' progress now takes place more frequently at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Assessments are analysed more rigorously and additional support for students making slower progress is beginning to be targeted more accurately.

The school's own data suggest that examination results in 2015 will be better than those achieved in 2014. Current data suggest that 45% of students are on course to attain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. This is because students in Year 11 are making better progress. However, their progress varies across subjects and progress in English continues to be stronger than that of mathematics. Many Year 11 students are attending after-school revision classes and are responding positively to mentoring programmes. However, the school's most recent assessments show that a significant gap remains between the attainment of disadvantaged students and that of their peers.

Senior leaders have recognised that more needs to be done to support those students who enter the school with low levels of attainment, and the growing

number of students for whom English is a second language. From January, the school adapted the curriculum to provide tailored tuition for these students, focused on the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills. The school has used reading assessments to establish the starting point of identified students and is tracking the progress they make. However, teachers delivering this programme have not received the necessary training and do not have the most appropriate teaching resources to address gaps in students' knowledge, skills and understanding rapidly.

The quality of teaching

The expectations of some teachers have been raised and most teachers now comply with the school's policies on marking and managing behaviour. Teachers' planning of lessons is more considered and lesson time is increasingly productive. The work in students' books shows that students have begun to take more pride in their presentation and some are increasingly keen to respond to the marking and feedback they receive. However, these improvements are inconsistent across subjects and classes.

There are still too many lessons that are planned to keep students busy, rather than explicitly focusing on developing their knowledge and skills. As a result, too many activities are pitched at a low level and do not challenge students to develop a deeper understanding of the subject.

In mathematics, teaching remains weak, because students are not taught underlying mathematical concepts and do not have sufficient opportunities to apply the calculation methods they learn to solving problems. Consequently, students are not developing the skills they need to be successful in examinations. The mathematics leader has only recently introduced a set of non-negotiable to try to establish greater consistency in teaching methods.

Senior leaders have made further changes to the school's policy on marking and feedback. The approach to marking developed in the English faculty is now being used as a model across the school. Most teachers are complying with the policy. The quality of comments students receive has begun to improve and, where practice is developing most rapidly, students are responding to teachers' comments and improving their work. More training is required so that quality marking and feedback become widespread.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Senior leaders, teachers and students all agree that behaviour in lessons and around the school is improving. Fewer lessons are now disrupted by poor behaviour. Students arrive and depart from school calmly and punctuality is improving. Teachers apply the school's behaviour policy consistently and students are clear as to what is acceptable and what is not. The sanctions the school employs to manage poor behaviour are well understood and are seen as an effective deterrent by most students. However, there continue to be incidents of unacceptable behaviour which

results in students being withdrawn from lessons. The numbers of students being regularly withdrawn for unacceptable behaviour and the number of exclusions remain high. Senior leaders and governors accept that more needs to be done, over time, to reduce the number of students being educated out of mainstream lessons and to reduce the number of exclusions.

Students' attitudes to learning remain variable. Where teaching fails to engage students fully, some students quickly drift off task. Weaker attitudes to learning are more prevalent in lower-ability sets and in Key Stage 3. Senior leaders are now more actively focusing their checks on teaching in these areas.

The level of absence from school is a deepening concern, as attendance has declined further below the low levels seen in 2013-14. Overall attendance so far this year is below 90% and therefore significantly below the national average. The attendance of students in Year 7 is the weakest of all year groups. The school has put in place a number of schemes to encourage good attendance and is working with the local authority to prosecute families where students persistently fail to attend. The most recent attendance data show a modest improvement, as the actions taken by the school begin to have some impact. However, improving attendance is a key priority for the school.

Steps have been taken to strengthen the school's curriculum for the personal and social development of students. A new curriculum at Key Stage 4 has been developed that helps students to understand about and avoid potential risks to their personal safety. This includes subjects such as violence in relationships, child sexual exploitation and drugs awareness. A number of external agencies, such as the Amy Winehouse Foundation, now work in the school and make a positive contribution to raising students' awareness.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the last monitoring visit the external review of governance has been completed and an action plan has been produced to address the recommendations. Three new governors have been appointed and they bring specific skills that were previously lacking, including financial management and safeguarding. The governors have also been involved in re-drafting the school's improvement plan. The plan now includes suitable milestones so that governors can evaluate the school's progress. Individual governors are now linked to the school's areas for improvement and now pursue areas of underperformance more rigorously. A steering group of governors has been established in order to evaluate the impact of the school's work and to hold senior leaders to account for progress. Governors now receive much better information about the quality of the school's provision, which is helping them to ask more probing and challenging questions. A review of the school's use of the pupil premium (additional government monies) has been completed and a new senior leader has been appointed to focus on this area.

Senior leaders have established more thorough systems for checking on the quality of teaching. These checks now identify specific strengths and weaknesses and lead to clear plans, with timescales, to address areas of underperformance. These checks show that the quality of teaching remains inconsistent and needs to improve further. In particular, teaching needs to improve in Key Stage 3 and the school's provision for teaching literacy skills, particularly for those students for whom English is a second language, remains weak. The performance of teachers is now managed robustly and, as a result, some teachers have left the school. Others are receiving good support to help them address weaknesses in their practice. Newly qualified teachers have settled well into their careers, because the school provides a sound programme of mentoring and training opportunities.

Middle leaders are being held more accountable for the quality of teaching and achievement. Line management meetings happen regularly and increasingly make use of data to analyse the impact of work to raise achievement. Some middle leaders are having a greater impact than others and some do not have the necessary skills to drive improvement rapidly. In addition, there are a number of gaps in key middle leadership positions. The school has been unable to recruit a subject leader for mathematics and the current subject leaders for English and science will leave the school at Easter.

The school's strategy to provide additional support for its disadvantaged students remains underdeveloped. Following the external review of the school's use of the pupil premium a new action-plan is being drawn up. Governors are aware that teachers and teaching assistants need clearer guidance on what they should do to better meet the needs of all disadvantaged students and narrow gaps in attainment. Raising the attainment of disadvantaged students is a key focus for the governing body. Further training for all leaders has been arranged so that a clearer strategy can be developed and implemented.

External support

Proposals by the local authority to replace the current leadership arrangements caused considerable uncertainty last term. The decision to withdraw the proposals has now re-established a firmer foundation for the school's development. The local authority is now working with school leaders and governors to agree a plan to address the school's significant budget deficit and return the school to a secure financial position.

The local authority has appropriate arrangements in place to evaluate the school's progress and challenge where progress is weaker. Helpful support is being provided to develop the school's curriculum for personal and social development.