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Mrs C Robinson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Robinson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre

Following my visit to your school on 14 January 2016, 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 December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, members of the senior leadership team, members of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan and other documents provided by the school were evaluated. You and I undertook a walk around the school with the vice-principal, making brief visits to lessons.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, a large number of new teachers have started at the school, including seven faculty leaders. A vice-principal has retired and new senior leadership team roles have been aligned with key areas for improvement.

It is no longer planned for the school to become an academy sponsored by the Navigate Academies Trust.

Main findings

Following disappointing GCSE results in 2015, leaders and governors have taken decisive action to address the areas for improvement. You provide strong, visionary and determined leadership of the enthusiastic senior leaders who are increasingly effective in their roles. Well-written development plans include clear targets which drive the actions for improvement. Middle leadership has improved. Consequently the quality of teaching has improved and outcomes for pupils are beginning to rise.

In 2015 the attainment and progress of students in the GCSE examinations were well below the national average in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. The school did not meet the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.

New procedures for collecting information about pupils' progress are rigorous. More aspirational targets have been set for pupils. Regular assessments are used to provide concrete evidence for the current progress of every pupil. These data are monitored by heads of faculty and the senior leader with responsibility for progress information, which is driving the improvements in this area. Teachers are required to provide detailed information about how they will address underachievement in their classes. This information is readily available on the back of classroom doors for senior leaders monitoring lessons. Early evidence suggests that outcomes for pupils are improving. There is a detailed evaluation of the progress of every pupil in the school.

Actions taken to address the areas for improvement are carefully monitored by a new, more rigorous quality assurance process. This is led by a vice-principal, in liaison with heads of faculty and heads of year. Heads of faculty have clear responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' progress, while heads of year monitor attendance, behaviour and homework. Consequently, senior and middle leaders know the strengths and weaknesses in the school very well and are quick to take action to address weaknesses.

A drive led by a senior leader to improve outcomes for the most able is changing the culture and expectations of the most-able pupils themselves and also of their

teachers. Training for teachers in teaching the most able, and revised lesson plans, highlight how these pupils will be stretched in lessons. An audit by an external organisation has provided useful areas to develop further. An imaginative approach, 'grade watchers', ensures the progress of the most able is regularly checked by senior leaders. Aspirations of the most able are being raised by a variety of interactions with universities, including presentations from Oxbridge (Oxford and Cambridge Universities). During the inspection the most-able pupils in Year 11 were observed in English and mathematics. The pupils were highly engaged and clearly focused on attaining the best possible grades. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* and A increased in 2015 and is on track to increase further in 2016.

There is an impressive array of training opportunities and seminars for staff. These enable teachers to model and share their good practice. Support plans are provided for those teachers who need to improve their practice. The performance management systems are more rigorous, with clear links to the areas for improvement. The school's marking and feedback policy is now used more consistently to good effect. In line with the policy, pupils make extended responses to feedback, which develop their understanding. Teachers check the responses. As a result, the quality of teaching is much improved.

A new homework policy has recently been launched to staff, pupils, governors and parents. Pupils have the opportunity to do their homework in after-school sessions supported by subject staff. Monitoring of planners suggests homework is being set more consistently, but it is too soon to see the impact of the new policy.

The governing body has been reorganised. This has enabled governors to collect first-hand evidence of the impact of actions taken to address areas for improvement through conversations with staff and pupils. The new committee structure is linked to regular training of governors by school leaders. Governors are now well informed about the strengths and weaknesses in the school. As a result, the challenge of governors to senior leaders is increasingly robust.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The Barnsley Alliance, the group responsible for school improvement in Barnsley, has provided funding to support improvements; for example, in the English faculty an external consultant is working with students to accelerate pupil progress. This work is having a positive impact on English outcomes in the current Year 11. Representatives of the local authority and the Barnsley Alliance have visited the school and as a result there is a plan in place for future school-to-school support.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane

Her Majesty's Inspector