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Mr Mal Kerr
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Kerr

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Noel-Baker School

Following my visit to your school on 19 October 2015, 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 February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the assistant headteacher with responsibility for managing behaviour, safety and welfare. The school improvement planning was reviewed along with your analysis of GCSE and A-Level results in 2015. Along with the assistant headteacher, I walked the school site and observed pupils arriving at school. I observed learning within mathematics, science and English lessons and looked at the work in pupils' books. You and I observed behaviour between lessons, at break and at lunchtime. I met formally with a group of Year 12, Year 11 and Year 7 pupils.

Context

The significant changes to middle leadership, planned at the last monitoring visit, are now in place.

Main findings

The behaviour and conduct of pupils has improved. The consequences and rewards system has been in place since September and there is evidence that disruptive behaviour has reduced. For example, the number of pupils excluded from school since September has decreased. The pupils I spoke with said that this new system was helping teachers to manage poor behaviour in a more effective way. However, some of the Year 7 pupils told me that some teachers hesitated to use 'C3', the most serious sanction, and said that this meant that 'Some pupils had got used to behaving badly.' These pupils said that too many chances were given to those who behaved badly and too little recognition was given to those who behaved well. All leaders need to make sure that teachers follow the behaviour system consistently, particularly in Key Stage 3. A minority of pupils must not be allowed the 'second chance' to disrupt the learning of others.

The Year 11 and Year 12 pupils that we spoke to recognise that behaviour has improved and said that the school feels very different. They said that there had been a 'massive increase' in the presence of staff around the school, particularly at break and lunchtime and that this was appreciated. When you and I observed the way in which members of staff managed behaviour at lunch and at break, we did see some effective strategies used. For example, a school-based specialist leader in education (SLE) was engaging a group of Year 7 boys in conversation and was able to calm their boisterous behaviour as a result. Lunchtime supervisors were also seen effectively managing the behaviour of pupils waiting for their lunch. Too often, though, we saw teaching staff lacking the confidence and skill to address disorder and missing opportunities to speak with pupils and encourage positive behaviour. The management of behaviour in corridors and at lunchtime is improving but remains inconsistent. You need to address this.

The systems to manage pupil attendance are now much stricter and there is a more rapid response if a pupil is absent from school. Along with the assistant headteacher, I observed pupils arriving at the school. We saw too many pupils still arriving late to school, seemingly disinterested by any penalty they would receive. A late start is not a good enough start and you need to make sure the system to manage this is much tighter.

You have replaced vertical tutoring, where tutor groups were a mix of year groups, with horizontal tutoring, where the tutor groups are all of the same year. The pupils I spoke with said that they value this change. Pupils in Year 11 said that they felt that tutor groups were now more productive because 'We are all in the same boat.' Each year group has a non-teaching year manager. Pupils said that the year

managers 'really helped them' and that they 'knew they had someone to talk to'. It is clear that these changes are working well.

You have established the 'Noel-Baker Six', a set of six classroom expectations. You said that this is an important way for curriculum directors to make sure that there is a consistent approach to learning. I visited lessons with you and with the assistant headteacher. We saw evidence that indicates that the Noel-Baker Six is beginning to have impact. I saw books that had been more regularly marked, and more evidence that pupils knew what they were learning and why. However, too many inconsistencies still remain. We saw too little evidence of the classroom expectation that teachers meet and greet pupils as they enter the classroom. We saw it used once, by a supply teacher, who, in an extremely positive manner, welcomed pupils to their learning. The pupils clearly appreciated this welcome. They need to experience it regularly.

A further Noel-Baker Six expectation is that all teachers will plan and display 'progressive objectives'. Some pupils we observed were unable to make the progress they should because the 'progressive objectives' they had been set were not appropriate for their ability. In two Year 8 lessons and one Year 9 lesson, this meant that many pupils were off task and beginning to misbehave. For example, one Year 8 pupil needed some more help to learn multiplication before he could complete the ratio activity set by the teacher. This pupil involved himself in a whole manner of distractions, but learned little. More needs to be done to make sure that the 'progressive objectives' precisely match the learning needs of all the pupils.

The Noel-Baker Six is impacting positively on the learning of older pupils in the school. Pupils in Year 12 and Year 11 said that they had really noticed that there was more consistency across their lessons. They said that their learning was now more 'serious' and that their teachers were 'ambitious for them'. One pupil I spoke with said that the changes had been palpable since the last time we met at the first monitoring visit.

Where your teaching expectations are not adhered to, the progress pupils make is limited and the behaviour of pupils is poor and badly managed. I saw too many examples of this on my visit to the lessons of Year 8 and Year 9 pupils.

Many new leaders joined the school in September. It is important that these leaders, particularly curriculum directors, receive the training and support they need to take ownership of the Noel-Baker Six within their subject areas and monitor effectively its implementation. You must make sure that any inconsistency is addressed more quickly.

We discussed the GCSE achievement of pupils in 2015. There has been some improvement. The progress pupils make in mathematics and science is still not good enough.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I will keep in telephone contact with the school to assess if further visits are required.

External support

The school continues to receive high-quality support from L.E.A.D. Academy Trust. This includes training for governors and those leaders new to the school. Departmental reviews of mathematics and science have also taken place and further such activity is planned.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Derby local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman
Her Majesty's Inspector