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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mr Russell Heritage
Executive Principal
Sheffield Springs Academy
Hurlfield Road
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S12 2SF

Dear Mr Heritage

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sheffield Springs Academy

Following my visit to your school on 14 March 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the sponsor are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- bring about more rapid improvement in teaching, attendance and outcomes.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the leaders of English and mathematics, a representative of United Learning (UL) and members of the local governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Lessons in English and mathematics were observed jointly with a senior leader. A meeting was held with pupils. Documents relating to the school's monitoring of the quality of teaching, pupils' progress, attendance and exclusions were scrutinised.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, a principal was appointed, a vice-principal left for promotion, and the executive principal reduced his level of support from 2.5 to 1.5 days a week. Since September 2015, a new director of mathematics has been working in the school part time, pastoral support has been restructured and plans are being developed for UL academies in the Yorkshire M1 corridor to work more closely together from September 2016.

Main findings

Since the last section 5 inspection, the pace of improvement in English and mathematics has not been fast enough. The school is not on track to become good by the time of the next inspection. The support and impact of the trust has not been substantial enough to enable senior and middle leaders to bring about rapid improvement in teaching, attendance and outcomes.

In 2015, the proportion of pupils gaining good GCSE grades in English and mathematics decreased. Rates of progress in English and mathematics declined and were low in English. In English, a history of staffing issues and weaker teaching contributed to pupils not completing their controlled assessments early enough, insufficient exam preparation and not enough time given to teaching literature, especially poetry. In mathematics, leaders focused on the C/D grade borderline and lower-ability pupils received insufficient support to make the expected levels of progress. Assessment has not been sufficiently accurate and predicted grades were overestimated. In 2015, the Year 11 cohort had higher key stage 2 starting points than in 2014, and the proportion of pupils who gained five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, increased. However, overall rates of progress remained low.

Staffing in English is now more stable. Controlled assessments are better managed and the teaching of literature is stronger. Weaknesses in pupils' learning are being identified more precisely and teaching is being planned more strategically to tackle them. The accuracy of assessment is checked more rigorously: in English, by a marker from the examination board linked to the executive principal's school in Rotherham, Wingfield; in mathematics, by the subject leader from a local outstanding Sheffield school, Notre Dame High.

The school predicts that rates of progress will improve in English and mathematics, though they are unlikely to reach national averages. Overall, the school estimates that progress, as measured by the new Progress 8 measure, may be close to the national average.

Teaching is improving too gradually. Teaching in English and mathematics continues to require improvement. English teachers have begun to identify pupils' needs more accurately at key stage 4, but tasks do not consistently support and challenge the

full range of abilities. The quality of marking is stronger than before and is helping pupils to improve their work.

In some mathematics lessons, teachers do not check how well pupils understand and do not take steps to help pupils consolidate their learning. New leadership arrangements in mathematics and English are beginning to make some improvements to the quality of teaching in both areas. However, this change has been late in coming and much remains to do to improve provision and outcomes in these core subjects to good.

Attendance dipped in 2015, and is currently at the same low level as this time last year. While some pupils with high absence have improved their attendance, a significant minority have not. The school's work in applying sanction and reward to improve attendance has yet to demonstrably impact on outcomes in this area. In October, the school set up an alternative provision centre for school refusers and non-attenders and this is having a positive benefit for a few pupils.

In some classes, teaching and relationships are not strong enough to manage instances of challenging behaviour and negative attitudes. Internal exclusions occur regularly in response to incidents of low-level disruption. A recent restructure of support staff is providing pupils with more effective support to manage their behaviour and academic progress. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced and are low. Behaviour around the school is calm.

The school still requires significant improvement. Not enough professional development has been focused on the needs of individual teachers. One third of teachers have volunteered to be coached, which demonstrates their increased commitment to improving their teaching. Newly qualified teachers feel they are well supported and as a result they are choosing to stay on at the school.

Members of the local governing body understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school and support the trust's proposal for greater collaboration with, and support from, other UL academies in the region. The executive principal is bringing about gradual improvement following the school's emergence from special measures, but the pace of change needs to increase and sustain positive improvements.

External support

Leaders have gained most of their support for subject leadership from the Learners First teaching school partnership in Rotherham and from Sheffield schools. The support for subject leadership provided by UL has been too distant and infrequent to drive rapid change. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes is improving too slowly. On occasion, UL commitments to provide support have not been met. UL has provided useful opportunities for leaders to update themselves on national developments in curriculum and assessment and contributed to improved

outcomes in humanities. The model of subject leadership introduced by UL in mathematics is beginning to have an impact. UL is proposing a strategy for more formal local collaboration between UL academies in the region. It is too early to judge its impact.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sheffield City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector