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Ms Nikki Shaw
Executive Principal
Barnsley Academy
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Dear Ms Shaw

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Barnsley Academy

Following my visit to your school on 11 May 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 academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

The school should take further action to:

- improve attendance, particularly of disadvantaged pupils
- develop the use of progress information by leaders to hold teachers to account for the progress of their pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, and members of the school improvement board (SIB), a group of Year 11 pupils and representatives of United Learning to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A range of documents, including the improvement plans, were evaluated. We conducted short visits to lessons.

Context

A new principal has been appointed who will start in June 2016. A new assistant vice-principal with responsibility for mathematics, a head of languages and an attendance team will also start in June 2016. New heads of English and science started in May 2016. Four new members have joined the SIB since the last inspection. The school will not have a sixth form intake in September 2016.

Main findings

Leadership and management have improved. The increased capacity of the senior leadership team can be evidenced by the accelerated improvement in the quality of teaching and the improvements in outcomes since September 2015. Your high expectations are clear to staff and pupils. You know the school well and your drive to improve the life chances of the young people in your care is at the centre of the actions you are taking to improve the school. Your improvement plans are detailed, clear and evaluated honestly against criteria for success. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for pupils have improved. The increased accuracy of the progress information collected in the school means that pupils' progress can be much more carefully tracked. Leaders are confident in their predictions of improved outcomes in the GCSE examinations this year.

The management of middle leaders is more robust. Regular meetings with senior leaders ensure that middle leaders are held to account for the quality of the work in their department and the progress of pupils in their subject area. Middle leaders have received support and training to help them to develop their role in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their departments. Consequently, middle leadership is improving. However, middle leaders are not consistently holding teachers to account for the outcomes of pupils. Pupils' outcomes are not included in the judgements made by senior and middle leaders about the quality of teaching.

As a result of well-considered and sophisticated professional development opportunities, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved. Five different pathways for the development of teachers' practice mean that support and challenge for teachers' development are carefully planned and personalised. Those whose practice is not good are coached to improve or offered individual support plans. Other colleagues share their good practice by working as coaches. Effective

support is provided for those who are new to teaching. Training is helping teachers to develop their planning to provide motivating and challenging work for all their pupils, and teachers' questioning to check pupils' understanding. Information provided by the school demonstrates the impact of this work on pupil engagement in lessons and improved attitudes to learning.

Compliance with the school's marking and feedback policy has been checked through scrutiny of pupils' books by senior and middle leaders. Pupils are more frequently responding to teachers' comments about how to improve their work in line with the policy. Year 11 pupils were seen during the inspection responding to feedback from their teachers in English. Pupils' responses to the feedback were helping to develop their examination answers and accelerating their progress. However, this effective practice is not consistent. The scrutiny of pupils' work does not include a review of the progress made by pupils over time. This reduces the impact of the work scrutiny on the judgements made by leaders on the quality of teaching.

During the inspection, Year 11 pupils were observed in a number of lessons in English and mathematics. The commitment and enthusiasm of the Year 11 pupils were striking. They recognise the improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and value the extra help they are being given to help them achieve good results. As a result, the outcomes for the current Year 11 are on track to be better than the outcomes for their peers in 2015. The school's progress information suggests that attainment and progress in English and mathematics are improving. Data shows that the most-able pupils are making progress in line with the national average in mathematics and above the national average in English. However, the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in Year 11 has not closed this year.

A significant package, coordinated by a consultant headteacher, is in place to improve the mathematics department. The package includes school-to-school support and the support from trust consultants and two specialist leaders of education. The head of department is well supported by the vice-principal for teaching and learning. All the mathematics teachers have had opportunities to observe good practice through visits to other schools, including local primary schools. Teachers have weekly training and opportunities to share ideas among the mathematics team. Consequently, the expectations of teachers have been raised about what their pupils can do. One of the specialist leaders of education has focused on mentoring teachers and on Year 11 progress; the other has developed the Year 9 curriculum. Significant financial investment has been made in providing a week-long intervention to help some Year 11 pupils with their mathematics. The school's progress information shows a considerable improvement in the achievement of the pupils who have received this extra help. Outcomes in mathematics are improving across the school and although the progress in mathematics remains below the national average in Year 11, it is improving.

The sixth form is led by a senior leader. The opportunities for the small group of sixth form students in Year 13 have expanded. All have been offered a work experience placement, with the majority accepting the opportunity. Students receive regular lessons to promote their personal, social and health education, independent guidance about careers, and opportunities to hear inspirational speakers. All students are on track to pass their examinations at the end of the academic year. As a result, all have university places.

Behaviour has improved. The school is calm and good relationships are evident. As a consequence of better behaviour, exclusions have reduced since last year. However, the majority of exclusions are of disadvantaged pupils. Attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils and key stage 4 pupils, is below the national average.

The school improvement board provides effective challenge and support both to senior leaders and United Learning. The interrogation of the information about standards in the school can be seen clearly in the minutes of meetings. New members of the board have appropriate educational experience which has added to the capacity of the board.

External support

Officers of United Learning have provided considerable support for the school through the work of yourself, the director of the northern academies, education advisers and subject advisers. United Learning also broker additional support from local schools to ensure that the school has the support needed to develop the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' outcomes. As a result, the capacity of senior and middle leadership, the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils have improved. The mathematics and science departments have been well supported during a time of staffing turbulence. The impact of this can be seen in improving standards in mathematics and increased stability in the science department.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the school improvement board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector