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Mrs Saira Luffman
Principal
Swallow Hill Community College
Whingate Road
Leeds
LS12 3DS

Dear Mrs Luffman

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Swallow Hill Community College

Following my visit to your school on 13 July 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 inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in February 2015. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

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

Yours sincerely

Phil Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2015.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to be at least good, so that students make good or better progress and reach higher levels of attainment across the academy in all subjects and year groups, including in the sixth form and especially in mathematics and science, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - in all subject areas consistently apply the academy’s marking and feedback policy so students are given clear advice about how they can improve their learning and work, and also ensure that students are given sufficient opportunity to respond to this advice
 - make better use of assessment information to plan learning activities that enable all students to make at least good progress
 - provide opportunities for students to develop stronger literacy and numeracy skills across different subjects
 - share the good practice that exists among some teaching assistants and some teachers so that high quality support in all lessons is provided for disabled students and those who have special educational needs
 - consistently apply the academy’s behaviour management policy so students are fully engaged in their learning throughout their lessons.
- Strengthen further the impact of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by ensuring:
 - the further development of the consistency and quality of subject leadership, so these leaders are equally effective in improving teaching and in holding teachers to account for students’ progress
 - that recent changes to the curriculum are monitored and evaluated in terms of the impact they have on improving students’ engagement in learning and raising their achievement
 - that leaders give a high priority to the training of less experienced and less effective teachers in order to improve teaching and achievement
 - that through working closely with the families of those students who are frequently absent from school, students’ attendance continues to rise.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 13 July 2016

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the principal, senior leaders in charge of teaching, learning and assessment, one governor and five subject leaders. Joint learning walks took place with the subject leaders in mathematics and science. A learning walk also took place in English and humanities. Pupils' work was sampled on each of these learning walks. Meetings were held with a group of Years 8–10 pupils and with the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)'s regional director of education and the executive headteacher of Rodillian Academy. A variety of documentation was reviewed, including the minutes of governing body meetings and monitoring records of teaching.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, a Year 11 achievement leader, one science teacher and a vice-principal have left the school. The principal is leaving at the end of this term. The school is fully staffed for September and a vice-principal has been appointed as the interim principal.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The principal, along with other leaders, has redoubled their efforts to tackle the school's weaknesses. Through a blend of resolute determination and sustained effort, there are signs that improvements are quickening. The principal is successfully empowering other leaders, including subject leaders, to take greater ownership and responsibility for improving the school. Effective plans are in place to ensure a smooth handover to the interim principal who takes over in September. Much thought and effort have gone into making sure that the momentum of improvement does not slow.

Enormous efforts have been made to try and improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Much more detailed and forensic checks are now carried out by senior leaders and teachers in the school, and some assessments are marked and verified by staff from supporting schools. This is helping to develop a really detailed understanding of what pupils have mastered and where they need more help, especially for those preparing for examinations. As a result, school leaders are confident that Year 11 outcomes will improve this year.

Leaders are successfully improving how they manage pupils' behaviour. There are now clearer, consistent and more effective ways of dealing with low-level disruption. Consequently, pupils and teachers report an improving climate for learning and pupils having better attitudes to learning. Closer links are developing between teachers and teaching assistants. As a result, helpful strategies to support individual pupils are being used by teachers more effectively. Attendance is improving.

Exclusions, the use of internal isolation and detentions have all reduced significantly.

Subject leaders are continuing to develop and improve. Their ability to check the quality of teaching and hold teachers to account for the progress pupils are making is better. Subject leaders know where the stronger teaching can be found and also what needs further improvement. They can demonstrate where they have made improvements but do not rest on their laurels. They, along with other leaders in the school, are determined to see the improvements continue. Subject leaders are energised, enthused and feel well supported by senior leaders. There are more opportunities for subject leaders to collaborate and share ideas with each other, and to meet subject leaders from supporting schools to improve their leadership. This is helping to improve curriculum planning and the quality of teaching.

Governors are hungry for improvement and are adopting a 'no excuses' culture for underperformance. They are benefiting from senior leaders' regular and detailed updates on the progress being made by pupils. Governors have an honest understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are improving their levels of challenge, especially in relation to the accuracy of assessments as well as on budgetary matters.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers are using assessment information more consistently to challenge pupils. Evidence in subjects such as mathematics and in some science books shows that there are increasing signs of challenge, including for the most able pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Teachers value, and are benefiting from, the array of targeted and specific training and coaching opportunities. This is helping to support teachers who need to improve their teaching quickly. It is also helping spread effective practice, both in terms of teaching and leadership.
- Pupils have a much stronger sense of what it means to be an effective learner and one pupil spoke for many when he said, 'It's easier for teachers to teach now.' Pupils and teachers comment positively on the improvements made to teaching and learning as a result of the changes in the way staff deal with misbehaviour.
- There are increasing opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills across school. A greater attention to accurate spelling and more opportunities for extended writing, particularly in history, can be seen in pupils' work.
- Individual case studies demonstrate the positive impact leaders are having in working closely with families of those pupils who are frequently absent from school. Impressive improvements have been made in increasing

attendance rates for these pupils and this in turn is helping to accelerate their progress.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Some teachers' expectations are not high enough and are not challenged quickly by leaders. In these classes, the school's marking and feedback policy is not consistently adhered to, work is poorly presented and it is not sufficiently challenging.
- Governors do not have regular opportunities to discuss and challenge subject leaders directly. Governors are too reliant on senior leaders to update them on the impact subject leaders are having.
- The attendance of some groups of pupils is not improving quickly enough. This includes pupils with a statement of special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils.

External support

The trust has brokered highly effective support from Rodillian Academy. This support is valued by senior leaders as it provides them with a useful sounding board, helping them prioritise and decide on the next steps for improvement. AET consultants provide helpful guidance and support in English and mathematics and, more recently, in science. Communication between the local authority and the school is an area for improvement. School leaders are not always clear why potentially vulnerable pupils, sometimes with very low levels of attendance, no longer need to have a child protection plan.