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26 September 2016

Mr David Cates
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cates

Following my visit to your school on 15 September 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 academy 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 April 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in April 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not 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:

- ensure the school's improvement plan identifies, clearly, the key priorities for the school and the actions needed to ensure they are achieved
- ensure that all staff understand clearly what the most able pupils can and should achieve in all subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, members of the governing body, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), subject leaders and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's action plan was evaluated. I visited a number of classes with you and the deputy headteacher.

Main findings

Both you and the deputy headteacher have a clear understanding of the school's priorities. However, these priorities have not been made clear in the plans you have produced or the messages you have communicated to staff. Although in draft form, the current plans do not adequately reflect the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 report. It is five months since the last inspection and these plans still lack clarity and direction. Too much time has been lost. As a result, others in the school, including subject leaders and teachers, do not have a clear understanding of the direction the school is taking and the expectations you have of them. For example, despite increased challenge for the most able pupils being a specific area for improvement in the section 5 report, teachers' expectations for these learners are still too low. Unless teachers raise the level of challenge for this group of pupils, directed by you, it is likely that these pupils will continue to underachieve.

You and the deputy headteacher have undertaken some important structural changes to the leadership team since the last inspection. Astute new appointments now place the school in a stronger position to drive important improvements towards the school becoming good. You have introduced greater rigour in the way you monitor the quality of teaching. Pupils' good behaviour in the school now means that the conditions are right for good learning to take place.

New subject leaders are diligent and knowledgeable. They have devised plans to tackle the areas of weaknesses in writing and mathematics. However, these plans are not as sharp as they could be in addressing the key issues in each subject area. For example, although leaders acknowledge that pupils' basic skills in mental arithmetic are significant barriers to their progress, there is no explicit mention of how this will be addressed in subject plans. In addition, the timelines for monitoring and evaluation activities are not clear. Expectations of what staff should do to address the weaknesses lack precision. The SENCo has a sound grasp of the barriers preventing the least able pupils and those with additional needs from making good progress. Training and development sessions for staff are helping to improve teachers' skills in meeting the needs of pupils who need extra help. For example, teachers are starting to use information about pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to plan more effectively for their progress.

Governors have developed a range of systems to hold leaders to account. Regular visits to school and meetings with key leaders mean that they have a sound grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors acknowledge that the plans for improvement, as they stand, are not helpful to them in monitoring the progress the school is making towards becoming a good school. They have confidence in your leadership and that of your deputy headteacher because of the track record of improvements you have made so far, although they acknowledge that there is much more work to be done. The governors understand that the school's website should be monitored more carefully to ensure it properly complies with statutory guidelines, which currently it does not.

The local authority continues to provide comprehensive support for the school. Advisers have been deployed appropriately to key subject areas. The local authority has brokered school-to-school support to further improve leadership. You have joined the local teaching school alliance to further develop leaders and other staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Her Majesty's Inspector