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Matt Robertson
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Dear Mr Robertson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Arnold Hill Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 2 November 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 academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors 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:

- analyse, more rigorously, the impact of the additional funding provided through the pupil premium and the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium so that governors can hold leaders fully to account for the impact of this spending.
- tackle the remaining pockets of poor behaviour, particularly in Year 9
- ensure that actions taken to tackle incidents of bullying are routinely followed up to ensure that they have been fully effective and that this process is systematically recorded
- ensure that the school's website reflects the most recent guidance from the department for education on the publication of key information.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, the chair of the local governing body and the chief executive of the Trent Academies Group to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school's improvement plan and the most recent self-evaluation. I also looked at records of pupils' achievement, behaviour and safety. I met formally with groups of pupils from key stage 3 and spoke with other pupils informally in the nine key stage 3 lessons I visited. I did not visit lessons in key stage 4 or the sixth form.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, there have been significant changes to staffing. You were appointed as acting headteacher in June 2016. Two senior leaders have left and the school has, in an interim capacity, appointed a deputy headteacher. New heads of department have been appointed to English, mathematics and science. Thirty-five teachers left the school at the end of the summer term 2016. Thirty teachers joined the school this term. The school formally became part of the Trent Academies Group in January 2016. The school's new building, under construction at the time of the section 5 inspection, opened at the start of this term.

Main findings

Despite significant turbulence in staffing, including at senior leadership level, the quality of education provided by the school is improving. In a short period, you have brought a calm authority to your role as acting headteacher and have strengthened systems of accountability. The leadership team are carrying out their roles increasingly effectively, not least because you monitor closely the work they are doing. The school's current evaluation of the quality of education provided by the school is honest and accurate. You recognise that there is still much to achieve for the school to be judged to be good at its next section 5 inspection. The school's improvement plan identifies precisely what needs to improve, how and when this will be achieved, who is responsible and how success will be measured.

Results in the 2016 key stage 4 examinations show a slight dip compared to the improvements seen in 2015. Nevertheless, provisional performance information indicates that the progress pupils made by the end of Year 11 in 2016 is likely to be broadly average compared to pupils in other schools nationally. Current information indicates that pupils currently in Year 11 are progressing and attaining increasingly well, including in English and mathematics. You know, however, that further work is needed to bring achievement in science in line with other subjects.

Good achievement in the sixth form has been maintained and attainment at the higher grades in academic subjects rose slightly in 2016. A much higher proportion of sixth-form students secured places at Russell Group universities than in the

previous year. While attainment in vocational courses dipped, students made good progress from their starting points.

At the time of the section 5 inspection, inspectors noted that disadvantaged pupils in key stage 3 were not making enough progress. Current assessment information, based on increasingly robust assessment, shows that achievement for this group of pupils is rising, particularly for middle and higher ability disadvantaged pupils. This is also the case in key stage 4. The school secured better outcomes for a larger majority of disadvantaged pupils than in previous years, including in last year's GCSE examinations. You and your staff have identified that boys continue to achieve less well than girls in English across the school and you have begun to implement strategies to tackle this. The pupils I met with spoke very positively about the impact of the new discrete literacy lessons, and particularly how these are helping them to improve their confidence when speaking in formal situations.

The school's records show that the quality of teaching is improving. You recognise, however, that teaching is still not consistently of good quality. Good strategies are in place for teachers' professional development, including for those who need the most support from the school's lead practitioners. You have ensured that timetabling is more equitable than before by spreading the best teaching practice more evenly so that middle- and lower-attaining pupils receive better teaching. Teachers are now more aware of the needs of individual pupils in their classes, how well the pupils are achieving, and, particularly, their responsibility to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Clearer and higher expectations of staff are leading to greater consistency in teaching practice.

The pupils were generally working well in the lessons I visited and were particularly enthused and engaged by their mathematics and science lessons. While in English the pupils got on with the work, levels of engagement were palpably lower than in the other lessons seen. In discussions, some pupils said that the format of the English curriculum is too repetitive.

In formal and informal discussions with pupils, most, though not all, were strongly of the view that the school has improved since the last section 5 inspection. The pupils I met in Year 8 are particularly pleased with the improvements made. They describe how teaching has improved, including how teachers are now more aware of when they need help. They appreciate the boost time which helps them work on areas of work they find difficult. These pupils spoke very positively about the impact of the many new teachers who joined the school this term. They also reported that behaviour has improved, in part because of pupils' pride in their new building and the improved resources they have to help them learn, but also because of the school's revised behaviour policy. All of the Year 7 pupils I spoke with said they were pleased with their new school. Pupils reported that they feel safe in school and that bullying has reduced. You have given extensive curriculum time to deepen pupils' understanding of bullying and these lessons have been well received. A few Year 8 pupils commented that while teachers are quick to tackle bullying, incidents

of bullying are not always followed up later to check that the bullying has not recurred. My analysis of the school's records confirmed that while bullying logs are well maintained, they do not always make clear how incidents will be followed up later to ensure that they have been fully resolved.

The small group of Year 9 pupils I spoke with were less positive about the impact of changes made than the other pupils. While they noted that the atmosphere around the school is more respectful than before, they said that some of their lessons are still affected by poor behaviour. It is important that senior leaders continue to pay close attention to the quality of learning experienced by this group of pupils.

Governors have a strong understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and can challenge school leaders and those from the trust effectively. Governors have a keen understanding of the school's remaining weaknesses. They monitor the effectiveness of the school's improvement plan closely. Governors also check how well disadvantaged pupils are achieving. However, the effectiveness of this area of their work is hindered by insufficiently detailed reporting by school leaders on the impact of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and for those who need help to catch up in English and mathematics in Year 7. The school's website does not reflect recent guidance from the Department for Education on how the impact of additional spending should be reported to parents. Information about the school's curriculum on the school's website lacks appropriate detail.

External support

The school receives good support from the Trent Academies Group. The chief executive of the group helped steer the school through the period of uncertainty following the departure of the previous headteacher and continues to offer regular support to you and other senior leaders. The school has benefited from considerable support from staff from across the trust to support teaching and leadership in a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector