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Martin Ebbage
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ebbage

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kirk Hallam Community Academy

Following my visit to your school on 16 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 school 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 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:

- embed the support that disadvantaged pupils from across all years receive, to diminish the difference between the achievement of these pupils and that of other pupils nationally across all subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you (the headteacher), senior leaders, subject leaders and the leaders who have responsibility for achievement, teaching and learning, and the sixth form. I visited six lessons, during which time I observed teaching, spoke with pupils and looked at their books. I conducted these visits with you, the headteacher. I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with the leader of the teaching school alliance that your school works with. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, during which I spoke with pupils. I looked at school documentation, including the school's action plan, its self-evaluation and its pupil premium review. I checked the school's single central record.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the subject leader of mathematics has left the school. A new subject leader of mathematics is in post.

Main findings

You and your senior leaders have taken prompt action to resolve those areas for improvement that inspectors identified at the last inspection. Your action plan identifies appropriate actions to ensure that the quality of teaching improves to secure better outcomes for pupils.

You have ensured that there are now higher expectations of staff in relation to the quality of teaching. You, and your senior leaders, undertake regular visits to lessons to ensure that teachers are meeting these higher expectations. Your visits focus on checking that teachers plan activities at the right level to secure pupils' learning, including that of the most able. You have also introduced regular occasions where you undertake unannounced checks of pupils' books. You do this to ensure that teachers provide pupils with feedback in line with the school policy, and to ensure that pupils are making progress in their learning. Your checks of lessons and of pupils' books enable you to keep a sharp focus on the impact teaching is having on improving pupils' outcomes. You challenge practice that does not meet your expectations effectively.

You have increased the opportunities that staff receive to work together to reflect upon and improve their classroom practice. For example, teachers have received training on asking effective questions. They also now take part in weekly, subject-based meetings where they share good practice. These opportunities have provided teachers with effective opportunities to learn from the good teaching that already exists within the school. In the lessons we observed, teachers had created tasks that were appropriately challenging, having taken into account pupils' prior learning. Teachers asked pupils questions to check their understanding, and provided support where it was necessary. In these lessons, pupils engaged well with their learning.

Subject leaders work closely with each other and with senior leaders to check the quality of teaching. This close working relationship is enabling subject leaders to support each other in developing their leadership skills and to secure improvements in teaching, particularly in mathematics and science.

Your attendance officer has increased the support she provides for disadvantaged pupils who do not attend school regularly. As a result, the proportion of these pupils who are absent from school is now declining. However, disadvantaged pupils across all years do not make the same progress as other pupils with similar starting points. You rightly recognise that this is because the support disadvantaged pupils receive is not yet fully embedded across all years.

Sixth-form leaders have been quick to increase the number of enrichment activities from which sixth-form students can benefit. They have ensured that students can benefit from a range of activities involving them in the wider life of the school. Sixth-form leaders have also planned information sessions on healthy living and personal finance, in response to students' requests.

Senior leaders have undertaken prompt action to ensure that pupils and parents are aware of the school's firm stance against bullying and the use of prejudicial language. You have run a workshop for parents on the different types of bullying and on how parents can help to keep their children safe, particularly online. For pupils, you have run assemblies that have focused on developing mutual respect. The school's records demonstrate that incidents of bullying and the use of prejudicial language have reduced this year when compared with the same time last year.

Governors have a clear understanding of the strength of the school's provision, and of what needs improving. They offer appropriate levels of support and challenge to ensure that leaders at all levels undertake effective action to improve the quality of the school's provision. Governors undertake regular activities to check the accuracy of the information they receive from school leaders, including talking with teachers and with pupils. This enables governors to be secure in their evaluation of the impact of leaders' work to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement.

External support

The school works closely with the teaching school alliance of a local school. This support has enabled leaders at all levels to develop their leadership skills. The support has also provided subject leaders with opportunities to be involved in subject networks that enable them to benefit from the best practice of other schools. The teaching school alliance has worked closely with senior leaders to ensure that their evaluation of the quality of teaching is accurate. To this end, the school has also employed an external educational adviser.

You, the headteacher, work closely with headteachers of local schools. These termly meetings have enabled you to learn from the practice at other schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hollingsworth

Her Majesty's Inspector