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Mr Stephen Playford
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Dear Mr Playford

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Glossopdale Community College

Following my visit to your school on 23 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 March 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 March 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action urgently to:

- create and implement robust quality assurance procedures which give an accurate account of the quality of teaching, assessment and leadership in the school
- improve outcomes for pupils by the end of Year 11, particularly in mathematics but more generally for boys, those pupils who are disadvantaged and/or of low ability, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- re-write self-evaluation and improvement documentation so that it is more focused on making the changes that are urgently needed.

Evidence

Glossopdale Community College has three separate sites. One is for Year 7 and Year 8 pupils, another is for Years 9 to 11 and a third is for sixth-form students. You took me on a tour of classrooms to see the learning that was taking place. This was restricted to Years 9 to 11 on this visit. Provision at key stage 4 was the focus for this monitoring inspection. I intend to consider other key stages on a return visit. During the inspection, I held meetings with you, two other senior leaders, a representative of the local authority and three members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated your self-evaluation documentation and evidence gathered from your quality assurance processes.

Context

Since the previous inspection, 12 teachers have left and 10 have joined the school. The number of Year 7 pupils joining the school in September 2016 increased by 40% when compared with the previous year. Construction work on a new site for the school is under way and this is planned to open in spring 2018.

Main findings

Overall achievement of Year 11 pupils in 2016 was poor. This was particularly the case for boys, disadvantaged pupils, those of low ability and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. All of these groups performed significantly less well than they should have done.

You were understandably disappointed in these outcomes. Some, particularly the general underperformance in mathematics, were not foreseen. Recruitment difficulties were a significant factor in pupils' performance in mathematics. However, this was not the sole factor in pupils' underachievement in mathematics; nor does it necessarily apply to other underperformance in other subjects. You have rightly identified that the accuracy of your achievement data needs to improve. There was better, and sometimes very good, achievement seen in languages, English literature and some subjects with smaller cohorts.

However, as this is the third consecutive year of overall underachievement, current leadership is not demonstrating the capacity to improve outcomes for pupils by the end of key stage 4. You and the governing body intend to review leadership capacity as an urgent priority.

Since the school's previous inspection, you have commissioned external reviews into the quality of teaching, mathematics provision and pupils' behaviour. These processes have given you more information with which to improve your practice.

The performance management of teachers has led to some leaving and others improving their teaching.

However, your quality assurance processes are not rigorous enough to give you an accurate picture of the school. The most important aspect to address with urgency is the accuracy of leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching. Your current data in this regard shows a very positive picture. This is incompatible with the achievement of pupils by the time they leave Year 11. It is imperative that the accuracy of these processes improves as performance issues cannot be resolved if they are not identified and followed up.

The unreliable information you have in this regard directly contributes to your self-evaluation and improvement documentation containing some significant inaccuracies. These important tools for improvement also lack the focus and precision which will help you and your colleagues improve your school more quickly.

Although leaders take action to improve the school, these are not followed up with the necessary urgency. For example, leaders introduced a rigorous policy on feedback to pupils for all teachers to follow in September 2015; 14 months later, you are aware that it is still not being adhered to as consistently as you would like it to be.

Although there are plans to re-locate, the move is not yet imminent. Much of the learning environment seen during the inspection could easily and readily be improved. Many corridors, walls and occasionally classrooms are drab and uninspiring and certainly do not match the school's recently adopted aspirational motto of 'The best by all, for all'.

Heads of faculty have undertaken a close review of GCSE examination performance to identify the possible reasons for the recent underachievement. Pupils' underdeveloped skills in extended writing are now a priority for you and it is important, particularly for your current Year 11 pupils, that this is acted upon swiftly. You have plans in place for staff training on this issue.

Improving attendance was identified as an area for improvement at your previous inspection. Current attendance is around the national average, though you acknowledge that there is still work to do to increase the attendance of some groups of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.

Your data reflects that you have improved pupils' behaviour. The number of incidents where members of staff have had to be called to classrooms to deal with poor behaviour has reduced significantly when compared with last year.

The addition of two education professionals, one of whom is a former secondary headteacher and another who is currently a primary headteacher, has strengthened the governing body. Although they were not required to do so through the previous inspection, governors wisely decided to arrange an external review of their practice. This is not yet complete but it has already given governors important areas of focus for their vital work. Their meetings are now tightly concentrated on the progress being made by pupils. Governors are well aware of the school's areas for improvement, particularly around quality assurance and subsequent performance management.

External support

The local authority has only recently begun to offer the school the necessary critical view it has needed for several years. A year ago, the local authority's view was that the overall effectiveness of the school was good. This was over-generous and unhelpful. The local authority has recently reviewed the quality of provision in the school and initial signs are that the view taken is more accurate. The local authority rightly considers the school a priority for its improvement work and has provided support through visits from other advisers.

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

Ian McNeilly
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector