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Mr Stuart Mundy
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mundy

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Conisborough College

Following my visit to your school on 25 May 2017, 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 June 2016. 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to ensure that:

- leaders at all levels maintain the effective teamwork to establish the new culture of improving pupils' outcomes
- the behaviour policy is approved and then implemented consistently by staff, and leads to a further and swift reduction in unacceptable behaviour
- the attendance of White British pupils improves to the same level as that of other pupils and this leads to them making better progress
- each middle leader receives the right leadership and management training, and has the confidence to run their department effectively.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders, three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with a group of Year 11 pupils and pupils from other year groups. I scrutinised the school improvement plan and the school's own self-evaluation. I made short visits to five lessons with the deputy headteacher responsible for teaching and learning. I took into consideration the external reviews of the school's work. These included the local authority's monitoring visits and independent reviews of the governing body, the pupil premium funding and the pastoral system.

Context

Following the section 5 inspection, and the unexpected poor examination results in 2016, you, leaders and governors decided that these events were a turning point in the school's work. You moved forward quickly to begin tackling the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. Your first action was to reorganise the responsibilities of the senior leadership team. A deputy headteacher is responsible for key stage 4, assessment information and safeguarding. A new deputy headteacher has responsibility for key stage 3, teaching and learning, and standards. You expect to make further changes to the leadership team during the next academic year. In addition, you appointed a permanent head of English. You also appointed interim leaders to the mathematics and modern foreign languages departments and restructured the pastoral team to increase accountability. An advanced skills teacher was employed to work with the science department for one academic year. One teacher of mathematics left the school at the end of the autumn term and a second at the end of the spring term.

Main findings

Despite the difficulties with recruiting experienced staff, you have successfully ensured that there is a stable staff team. The school has benefited from the expertise of advanced skills teachers working alongside colleagues in mathematics and science. You have successfully introduced a new culture of working and gained the support of staff, who accept the vision of pupils aspiring, believing and succeeding. The positive changes made have been possible primarily because you willingly agreed to accept the excellent support from the local authority. The local authority's critical evaluations of the school's work have enabled you and other leaders to provide more challenge and support to staff while increasing levels of accountability. Importantly, you have not shied away from working alongside staff in the science and mathematics departments. Senior leaders have used your leadership expertise and insight about what successful leadership of departments looks like to train others. Curriculum leaders have benefited from the well-considered training.

You and your senior leaders all recognise that there is still more to do. Nevertheless, my discussions with middle leaders indicate that they feel more confident in holding staff to account and using assessment data well when monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress. Middle leaders say that their teamwork is a strength and inspection evidence supports this view. They state that they are part of the change, and planning and monitoring are central to their work. However, not all middle leaders have had the training to develop the leadership skills required for managing a subject department.

Leaders at all levels have increased their focus on quality planning and teaching. However, there is not a common approach to planning, and neither is there a sharp focus on evaluating the effect of training provided on teaching and learning. The school improvement plan is fit for purpose and linked to the school's self-evaluation, which is accurate. However, the evaluation of the impact of actions completed is not routinely carried out in a timely manner to inform the next steps.

Pupils are very positive about the recent changes and say that the school is a different place, behaviour is better and teachers do all that they can to support them. I agree with you and other leaders that White British pupils are not doing as well as other groups. You and other leaders recognise that these pupils' attendance is too low and that their progress could be much better. Governors are adamant that there will not be a repeat of the 2016 examination results. This has led them to use their expertise to check on the accuracy of assessment information carefully. As at the previous inspection, they are critical and supportive.

External support

You have made good use of the local authority's insightful reviews and support for middle leaders to develop their leadership and management skills. You have worked with the other leaders to work on the recommendations of the external reviews on governance, pupil premium funding and the pastoral system. You acknowledge that the school requires more work to become good. Importantly, all of the changes have helped you and other leaders to review the school's effectiveness more critically and realistically.

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

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector