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Mrs Christine Robinson
Principal
The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre
Goldthorpe Road
Goldthorpe
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Dear Mrs Robinson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre

Following my visit to your school on 11 September 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 November 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 November 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils
- tackle the remaining inconsistencies in teaching, learning and assessment.

Evidence

During the inspection, I had meetings with the principal, senior and middle leaders, four representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the chair of Barnsley Schools Alliance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited lessons with a senior leader, talked to pupils and looked at the work in their books and folders. I evaluated the school's action plan and looked at a range of documents relating to self-evaluation, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the school's safeguarding arrangements.

Context

Since the last inspection, an assistant principal has left the school and a director of science has been appointed to the senior leadership team. Five governors have also joined the school's governing body.

Main findings

The principal, senior leaders and governors are tackling the areas requiring improvement with drive and determination. They have an accurate picture of the school's performance and their action plans are sharply focused on the areas needing further work. Importantly, leaders have secured the strong support of their colleagues, who share their high expectations and ambition for pupils to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Senior leaders have a clear and well-thought-out strategy for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. It is purposefully led by senior leaders and middle leaders are making an important contribution to improving teaching, learning and assessment in the subjects they lead. As a result, teachers' practice is improving and pupils are achieving better outcomes, especially in English and mathematics. Crucially, however, pupils do not make consistently strong progress in all subjects as a result of the remaining weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. The principal, senior leaders and governors know that tackling this inconsistency is critical to moving the school to good at its next section 5 inspection.

Senior leaders have radically redesigned their approach to improving the outcomes that disadvantaged pupils achieve. The recommendations from an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding have been used wisely by senior leaders and their plans are comprehensive and ambitious. Actions focused on improving the curriculum and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are balanced well with targeted interventions and personalised support. The school's assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils are making faster progress and there was a marked improvement in the GCSE qualifications achieved by disadvantaged Year 11 pupils in 2017. Nevertheless, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils in all year groups is too low. The poor or irregular attendance of some disadvantaged pupils has an unacceptably negative impact on the

outcomes they achieve. This crucially important aspect of the school's pupil premium strategy and the external support provided by the local authority need to be strengthened.

Governors responded swiftly to the findings of the last section 5 inspection report. They commissioned, and quickly acted upon, the recommendations of an external review of the effectiveness of governance. Recently appointed governors have brought essential knowledge and skills and the governing body is working in a more focused and systematic way. As a result, governors are scrutinising key areas of the school's work and challenging leaders more effectively.

The arrangements for identifying pupils who are vulnerable or at risk and giving them the help and protection they need are effective. The support provided for pupils who are looked after by the local authority is well coordinated by senior leaders.

External support

External support has been provided by specialist leaders in education, for example to develop the curriculum in French, history and computing. Although this support has been valuable, it has had limited impact on the outcomes achieved by pupils in these subjects. Additional external support is needed to increase the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and to secure improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in computing.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Whittaker
Her Majesty's Inspector