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Mr Richard Mansfield
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mansfield

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pennine Way Junior Academy

Following my visit to your school on 25 April 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the academy to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- further refine assessment practices to ensure that targets for improvement are accurate
- refine the school improvement plan so that it clearly identifies the specific aspects of teaching that need to be improved for all subjects
- check that actions and initiatives are implemented fully and consistently by all staff.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the two deputy headteachers, subject leaders, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. You and I visited six lessons and, together with one of the deputy headteachers, we looked at a sample of pupils' work. I also met with pupils and scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding.

Main findings

You, other staff and the governing body are working successfully to tackle many of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You are leading a cohesive leadership team, including subject leaders who are having increasing impact on improving the quality of teaching. You have introduced, or are developing, a wide range of initiatives to improve the quality of teaching.

In 2017, progress in reading and mathematics was below the national averages. Progress in reading and writing declined compared to the previous year. The proportion of pupils attaining greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics also declined. The attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils, particularly in reading, were well below those of other pupils nationally. However, current school assessment information and work in pupils' books show that standards are improving overall.

The focus you have placed on improving standards in mathematics is evident in pupils' books and the lessons we observed. The knowledgeable leaders for mathematics are successfully leading staff in the implementation of a 'mastery' curriculum. They are supporting staff in improving teaching. The impact of this work is evident in teachers' use of visual imagery and practical apparatus to support pupils' understanding. In lessons, teachers often encourage pupils to move on to challenging work. Teachers are providing pupils in all classes with frequent opportunities to develop their reasoning skills and problem-solving skills. Pupils' work is often of a high standard.

You are also implementing a range of actions to improve standards in reading. School leaders have provided staff training to develop a 'reciprocal' approach to pupils' learning of reading skills and a new guided reading strategy has been introduced. Leaders have also introduced resources to support the development of pupils' comprehension skills. Staff have re-organised reading books so that books are better matched to pupils' abilities. Work to raise the profile of reading is successful, including the development of the new library. One pupil in Year 6 said: 'The new books and new environment... make sure we have interesting books and we enjoy reading.' Pupils in Year 6 also told me how they enjoy reading with younger pupils to help them improve their reading.

This year, you have restructured the organisation of classes for the teaching of English and mathematics. Both staff and pupils regard this positively. Leaders say that this has 'reinvigorated' teaching and enables teachers to meet better the needs of the most and least able pupils. Staff ensure that pupils have increasing opportunities to apply their writing skills in different subjects. In our observations of teaching and learning, we saw that lessons are calm and well ordered. Pupils behave well. Pupils I spoke with are positive about their school. They say that teachers encourage and challenge them. We also saw, however, that there are some inconsistencies in teaching. In some classes, the pace of learning and level of challenge were not consistent.

To help improve the consistency and quality of teaching, you have established a robust system for checking and managing the performance of teachers. Senior leaders hold regular meetings with staff to review pupils' progress carefully and identify the actions needed to help pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, to make the progress they should. However, leaders have not ensured that their initiatives are consistently and securely implemented by all teachers. Work in books show, for example, that teachers' expectations for the accuracy of pupils' spelling are not consistently high.

Your evaluation of the school's performance is accurate and identifies clear areas for improvement. Both the school improvement and pupil premium plans now include measurable targets for pupils' attainment. However, in some subject areas, the improvement plan does not make clear to all staff and the governing body the specific aspects of teaching, learning and assessment that need to be improved. Furthermore, the targets for improvement initially set by leaders have been modified because they were not accurate. In many instances, targets set were quickly surpassed because they were too low.

You have ensured that moderation of teachers' assessments of pupils' writing and mathematics has been carried out within the school, and with other schools, to deepen staff's understanding of pupils' learning and the requirements of the national curriculum. Less progress has been made in moderating the assessment of reading. Leaders have developed a new system of reporting pupils' progress and attainment to the governing body. Governors receive detailed information and discuss the progress of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, in their meetings. However, leaders recognise that there is still work to do to ensure that teachers' assessment of pupils' learning is accurate. Current school information, for example, shows that the proportion of pupils on track to achieve greater depth in mathematics is low in all classes. However, the quality of pupils' work suggests a more positive picture. It is crucial that leaders ensure that assessments of pupils' learning are accurate in all subjects. This will enable teachers to identify even more effectively the needs of the most and least able learners, leaders to set ambitious and realistic targets, and the governing body to more sharply hold leaders to account.

Leaders have ensured that their and staff's work to develop pupils' awareness of cultural diversity and different religions is having a positive impact. Pupils in Year 6 spoke with confidence about British values. They understand the idea of mutual respect. When I asked pupils why they thought it might be important to learn about different religions, one pupil said: 'So we can learn what other people around the world believe and think. So it is not just what you think is right.'

Safeguarding is effective. The single central record of employment checks is thorough and well organised. There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Pupils say they are safe and that bullying is rare. They are confident that staff will resolve any concerns that they may have.

Leaders are taking effective action to improve standards. Leaders work cohesively together to drive improvement. However, the pace of improvement is not as rapid as it could be in some areas. Expectations are not as high as they could be. Leaders recognise the need for greater urgency and for holding staff to account. It is now essential that leaders ensure that their initiatives are consistently having the maximum impact on accelerating pupils' progress and raising their attainment.

External support

The academy receives termly visits from the local authority and has also bought in additional support from a local authority adviser. This support is helping to develop assessment and target-setting practice in the school. Leaders say that they have found this support more useful and challenging this year.

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

John Lawson

Her Majesty's Inspector