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26 June 2018

Ms B Matthews
Headteacher
Thornhill Community Academy
Valley Drive
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West Yorkshire
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Dear Ms Matthews,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thornhill Community Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 18 June 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 academy 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 has received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

Senior leaders and trustees 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 academy should take further action to:

- continue to strategically and effectively use the additional funding available to further improve the achievement of those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and develop sophisticated approaches to improve communication about their needs across the school further
- improve teachers' practice further so that it provides more opportunities for the most able pupils to develop their creative and problem-solving skills
- improve further the attendance of those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the interim headteacher designate and other

senior leaders. I also met with the chief executive officer of the SHARE Academies Trust and representatives of the school's board of trustees. School documentation, including the school self-evaluation document, improvement plans and other relevant documents, were scrutinised. I conducted short visits to several lessons with you. A sample of pupils' work was reviewed alongside senior leaders. I also met with a group of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 to evaluate their views on developments since the last inspection.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in the senior and middle leadership of the school. A director of inclusion has been appointed with a specific focus on the progress and achievement of those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders of English and mathematics have been appointed too, in place of those who have left the school. You and trustees have commissioned external reviews of the school's SEN provision and improvement planning and you are acting upon their findings.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, you have reviewed thoroughly all areas identified for improvement and have produced detailed plans to tackle weaknesses. You have embedded rigorous systems to support the development of classroom practice and tackle any weaker teaching. You have also been determined to challenge any ineffective middle leadership.

You have identified the need for, and created, specific roles and responsibilities. Together with the chair of the trustees, you have managed staffing changes effectively and appointed experienced staff in some important areas of responsibility, including the appointment of a new director of inclusion. As a result, leadership and management has increased in its capacity and the rate of school improvement has accelerated further. Leaders and trustees have taken a range of appropriate actions to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Your improvement plans are very focused and are evaluated accurately against clear criteria for success. The quality of teaching and learning, and the progress of pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities, are improving as a result.

Since the last inspection, you and trustees have commissioned several external reviews, including those focused on the use of the additional funding provided for those pupils who have SEN and /or disabilities. These reviews confirm that your actions are having the necessary effect and you are quick to act upon the developments which they recommended.

It is clear from the evidence I was able to gather during my visit that you had started to implement strategies to address the weaknesses identified in the last

inspection report at a very early stage. More recently, a shift change in the culture of the school means that all staff have embraced a responsibility for the progress of every pupil, including those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Internal and external reviews have prompted leaders to implement strategies so that the outcomes and experiences of all pupils, including those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities improve.

During our joint visits to lessons, we were able to confirm that the expectations of pupils are high. It was clear from our observations that teachers are now planning learning activities which consider what pupils already know. Teachers are now using detailed and accurate information about pupils' progress to plan learning activities which challenge them and match their needs, including for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and for those who are the most able. More work does need to be done however, to ensure that the most able pupils are given opportunities to problem solve and be creative. It was particularly encouraging to observe how you and your leaders have ensured that the most vulnerable of pupils are benefiting from a curriculum which matches their needs well. The 'Bridge' facility is a relatively new innovation for the school, catering for pupils who have struggled to succeed in the main school setting. Pupils in the 'Bridge' are enthusiastic about learning in this environment and I observed evidence first hand the positive impact it is having on pupils' outcomes.

There is now a much greater focus on providing high-quality additional and tailored support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities in lessons. Our visits to classrooms and the joint scrutiny of pupils' books indicate that current work in their books shows much improved progress for these pupils. School assessment information indicates that a larger proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are now on or above their academic targets than was the case at this point in 2017. The newly introduced 'task plans' are valued by pupils and provides those pupils who have them with a clear framework for progress which is specific to individual subjects.

Trustees have worked closely with you and leaders to tackle the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. They have benefited from external training and from regular and focused meetings in school. Middle leaders present information to trustees regularly, and trustees in return challenge middle leaders to evidence their claims with supporting information and data. Trustees have a responsibility to evaluate specific aspects of the work of the school, including the use of the additional funding for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. As a result, they have been able to ask the challenging questions which further prompt leaders to review and improve the effectiveness of their actions.

Since the last inspection, you acted quickly to raise the profile of those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities across the whole school. You have ensured that classroom support staff have been retrained so that the support they offer to these pupils in the classroom is of the type which will encourage better progress.

Teachers now have the information they need to plan for the progress of these pupils considering their specific needs. For example, pupils now have the opportunity to improve their progress through using 'task plans' to structure their learning in subjects. Additional funding available has been used wisely to develop these resources and train staff in their use. As a result, the progress of those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has improved in a wide range of subjects. However, leaders acknowledge there remains further work to do to improve the sharing of information with key staff and continue these improvements in the pupils' progress.

Those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities do not attend as regularly as most other pupils. Although attendance overall in the school has improved since the last inspection, the attendance of these pupils has not, despite the extensive actions and strategies employed by school leaders. Leaders also acknowledge that this area for improvement should remain a priority.

You and your leaders have established a strategically focused cycle to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in the school. This includes joint observations and work scrutiny involving senior and middle leaders. This monitoring process is closely linked to the school's appraisal arrangements and a comprehensive and focused programme of professional development. You have introduced systems, such as the '15 standards' framework, which allow your senior and middle leaders to identify accurately, the development needs of teachers and put into place appropriate support and training. Line management processes are now better focused on pupils' progress in subjects and lessons. Through these meetings and Year 10 and Year 11 'RAG' meetings, middle leaders are now able to swiftly identify any pupils who require intervention to ensure that they make better progress. The use of 'watch lists' provides leaders, teachers and classroom staff with the information they need to support the learning of those pupils who are falling behind where they should be. You made sure that staff receive appropriate training on initiatives, such as the use of school information to support the learning of those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

External support

The school intends to join the SHARE Academy Trust in the very near future. Trustees have been thorough in selecting the trust as one which can offer school improvement advice and further capacity through school-to-school support. The trust has already provided professional development opportunities and training for leaders in the school. As a result, leaders at all levels are more confident and have implemented several practices which are having impact. For example, the '15 standards' framework for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning has had a significant impact on establishing greater consistency in the effectiveness of teaching and learning across the school.

In addition, the external reviews of SEN provision have provided the school with

specific development recommendations which leaders have swiftly addressed.

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

Yours sincerely

Barry Found
Her Majesty's Inspector