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Mr D Barrowclough
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Barrowclough

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Forge Valley School

Following my visit to your school on 21 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 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 has received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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 school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- continue to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities so that attendance is at least in line with the national average
- develop action planning which is precise and sharply focused against clear success criteria
- take full advantage of school-to-school partnerships within the multi-academy trust to develop teaching, learning and assessment further.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior and middle leaders. I also met with the chief executive officer of the Tapton School Academy Trust and

representatives of the school's board of governors. 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 and 9 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. You have recently recruited two assistant headteachers who will take up their posts in September 2018 and have appointed teaching and learning 'angels' who have been in post since September 2017. In addition, you have made changes in the leadership of mathematics and in other subject areas.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, you have reviewed all areas identified for improvement and have produced plans to tackle weaknesses. These plans are focused accurately on the areas that require further improvement. You have developed a robust system of quality assurance which allows you to accurately judge the quality of teaching and learning. This approach has assisted you in developing classroom practice and to tackle the areas of middle leadership which are less effective.

You have also identified the need to encourage a culture of improvement at all levels. You have created specific teaching and learning 'angel' roles and have appointed talented staff into them. As a result, leadership and management have increased in their capacity and the rate of improvement has accelerated further. Leaders and governors have taken a range of appropriate actions to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Your self-evaluation is accurate. However, you acknowledge that improvement plans need to contain more precise success criteria to allow the effectiveness of leaders' actions to be evaluated swiftly. Nevertheless, teaching and learning are improving, and staff are motivated, energised and keen to take ownership of these improvements at all levels.

Since the last inspection, you have been quick to review your expectations of teachers and, in turn, their expectations of pupils. It was clear during my visit that there has been a demonstrable focus on the quality of teachers' questioning in the classroom, as well as a focus on the presentation of pupils' work – both areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Teachers now give pupils opportunities to develop their thinking through considered and skilful questioning. Pupils respond confidently and the quality of presentation in their books reflects that they are taking pride in their work too. Pupils told me this has been a big change since the beginning of this academic year. The school's own pupil surveys evidence that pupils generally value these recent changes and that the changes support their

learning. Evidence from parent surveys and from my meeting with pupils indicates that a few pupils, parents and carers are not confident that all leaders' actions are having the positive effect of which, during my visit, I could see evidence. Leaders agree that improving communication with parents and pupils about the positive changes that are happening should be an area to consider in the future.

The pupils I talked to were keen to show off the work they were proud of and to explain it to me. Leaders have been keen to provide pupils with examples of work so they can aspire to the highest quality of presentation. Pupils report that the 'gold standard' books provided to them have been helpful in guiding them towards expected standards of presentation and higher-quality work. Further scrutiny of books and observations in lessons confirmed that expectations of pupils are also improving, and the level of work set is more appropriate to pupils' abilities and ages. Teachers regularly and systematically check on pupils' understanding through written feedback. Pupils report that verbal feedback is more useful to them and leaders are responding to this with planned changes to the way their next steps for learning will be communicated to them.

You have also reviewed the behaviour management policy, which has resulted in a reduction in the level of fixed-term exclusions compared to the last two years. During our lesson observations, we observed no disruptive behaviour. Pupils reported to me that they feel behaviour has improved since the review of the behaviour policy, but they still believe there is room for further improvement. Leaders accurately identified this as an area for further improvement through their school self-evaluation.

Since the last inspection, you and leaders have worked tirelessly to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. The school has used additional funds to employ its own dedicated educational welfare officer and to fund a series of strategies, including a rewards scheme. The educational welfare officer is determined to tackle a culture and legacy of low attendance through his work with primary schools, including with the parents of Reception children. The school has held supportive meetings with pupils at risk of low attendance and their parents. Attendance panels provide a forum to challenge and support families and legal proceedings are initiated where appropriate. In addition, the school has begun to work in partnership with another local school which has high attendance rates and, through this partnership, is further developing policy and practice. These actions have been effective to a degree and attendance for both groups of pupils has improved. However, the attendance of both groups of pupils remains too low. Leaders acknowledge that further improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities remains a priority.

You and your leaders have established a clear strategy to routinely 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 linked

to a comprehensive programme of professional development aligned to the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Your monitoring processes have concentrated on the specific aspects of teaching and learning which require further improvement. Leaders at all levels are well versed in these improvement priorities, and their ideas about teaching and learning are of high quality, evaluative and focused. In the documentation I scrutinised, it was clear that development areas identified are followed up and teaching and learning are improving as a result. Teaching and learning 'angels' are effective leaders and the focus on teaching and learning has been re-energised. Leaders and teachers are keen to share good practice and there is an enthusiasm in the school for doing the very best for its pupils.

External support

The school belongs to the Tapton School Academy Trust. As the trust develops, leaders have begun to take advantage of the support the trust can offer, particularly in the development of teaching, learning and assessment. The trust has provided professional development opportunities and training for leaders, teachers and staff in the school. As a result, leaders at all levels are becoming more confident and have further clarity about the direction of travel and the support they can access in the future. Leaders acknowledge that more extensive use of these developmental partnerships will further support school improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sheffield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Barry Found
Her Majesty's Inspector