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Mr Richard Wood
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wood

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Mexborough Academy

Following my visit to your school on 12 July 2018, with Natasha Greenough, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in September 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the proposed academy trust, a group of pupils, a group of staff and a group of middle leaders. Pupils were also spoken to at social times. Inspectors also met with staff to discuss attendance, safeguarding and attainment of pupils. The school's improvement plan was evaluated. A range of lessons was visited, the majority with senior leaders.

Context

The school is part of Wakefield City Academy Trust (WCAT). The school improvement support for the school from WCAT stopped shortly after the section 5 inspection. Support from the local authority, mentioned in the section 5 report, stopped at about the same time. The school is in the process of joining a different

academy trust. This process started shortly after the section 5 inspection. The proposed academy trust was identified but not officially confirmed by the time of this monitoring visit. There is no official support from the proposed academy trust. Because the school is moving to another trust, the governing body, in conjunction with senior leaders, decided not to commission the review of the pupil premium spending or the review of the governing body as recommended in the section 5 report.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since the inspection, leaders and managers at all levels have concentrated on improving teaching to increase pupils' progress and raising the proportion of pupils who attend regularly. As a result, attainment across the school is rising, especially in Years 10 and 11 and pupils are making more progress. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils is also starting to rise. However, it is rising at a slower rate than that of other pupils. A rigorous approach to verifying the information provided about pupils means that the school is much more confident about pupils' current attainment and progress. The majority of teachers are using information much more effectively to ensure that lessons are pitched at the right level for pupils and misconceptions are picked up and dealt with. However, this is not the case for all teachers. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve and as a result do not challenge pupils enough in lessons. The school identified that some pupils' low literacy levels inhibit them from having access to the curriculum. A literacy strategy focused on pupils in Years 7 and 8 is improving reading ages and literacy levels. The 'he can' initiative focusing on raising the expectations of boys is appreciated by the pupils and is enabling them to see options open to them.

Staff at all levels feel that they are supported and challenged to improve and 'do their best'. Regular line-management meetings focused on each pupil as an individual combined with regular 'book looks' and visits to lessons mean that everyone is fully aware of where the pupils are and what needs to improve.

As a result of the focus on attendance, a higher proportion of pupils in Years 7 to 9 now attend school regularly. There is a clear plan in place to improve attendance, which is monitored regularly. Support for parents, combined with help from outside agencies where appropriate, is also helping. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is decreasing. However, there are still issues with attendance, especially in Years 10 and 11. Disadvantaged pupils tend to attend school less regularly than other pupils.

The new behaviour policy is working. Pupils and staff agree that the school's atmosphere is calmer and behaviour has improved. The rewards for positive behaviour are appreciated. As a result, the number of days lost to fixed-term exclusions is falling.

Governors are informed through the headteacher's succinct, honest and relevant reports about where the school is at. A parent governor has filled one vacancy on the governing body. However, the re-brokering process has halted the filling of the rest of the vacancies. The chair of governors has undertaken training on safeguarding.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose. However, it would benefit from the addition of specific and measurable success criteria to allow for more accurate monitoring of improvements.

There is no trust statement of action because of the re-brokering situation.

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

Yours sincerely

Tanya Stuart
Her Majesty's Inspector