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Mr Andy Ireland
Headteacher
Sheffield Inclusion Centre
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Dear Mr Ireland

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sheffield Inclusion Centre

Following my visit to your school on 17 September 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in June 2017, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and the responsible authority 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:

- ensure that the implementation of the new staffing structure and school improvement plan improves pupils' academic progress and attainment, promotes their personal development, increases their reintegration into schools and increases their participation in education, employment and training post-16.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior and middle leaders, members of the management committee and representatives from the local authority and from Learn Sheffield, the school improvement service. We discussed the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement action plan. I visited two alternative providers with leaders from the centre. I observed lessons jointly with senior leaders at the centre and at the alternative provision and I met staff at the alternative providers. I scrutinised monitoring and evaluation documents and management committee minutes.

Context

The local authority appointed a new management committee in summer 2017. You took up post in September 2017. A new staff structure took effect from September 2018. Several new middle and senior leaders, including a deputy and assistant headteacher, have started recently. Many staff were temporary and almost all are now permanent. The centre has a large financial deficit.

The number of pupils on roll has remained high due to the high level of exclusions in Sheffield. It is one of the largest pupil referral units nationally. The centre has more pupils than places. This means that the centre depends on the use of alternative providers. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language, many of whom are Roma Slovak, continues to be high.

Main findings

You and your management committee have taken effective action to bring about improvement in the leadership and management of the centre. Your clear plan sets out the actions you are taking to meet your school improvement priorities.

You are communicating a clear vision effectively to other stakeholders. You have increased the visibility of the centre and clarified its aims with the wider school community and the local authority. You are influencing improvements in local authority procedures for funding and for referral from, and reintegration to, schools and academy trusts. Senior and middle leaders welcome your clear direction and measured approach. Key staff communicate a sense of purpose, commitment to the school improvement priorities and a spirit of optimism.

You and the management committee have managed the staffing restructure well. Leadership and staffing are now stable. The rationale for senior roles and the deployment of teaching assistants supports the strategy for improving academic achievement at the centre and at alternative providers. Staff roles and responsibilities support the priority to improve pathways to post-16 provision. Increased time for the special educational needs coordinator gives more scope for meeting pupils' needs. New and existing staff have clearer responsibilities for improving the therapeutic support for pupils and their mental health.

You have raised expectations of academic achievement at key stage 4. You have entered more pupils for examinations and you have set higher ambitions for what they can achieve. As a result, in 2018, twice as many pupils as in 2017 gained a GCSE pass in English and in mathematics, from a Year 11 cohort of a similar size. More pupils also gained qualifications in other subjects. Staff are more focused on promoting academic achievement and have higher aspirations of what pupils can achieve. Plans are in place for professional development to increase teachers' subject-specific skills and the consistency of teaching and learning, especially in the secondary phase.

A new system is helping teachers to assess pupils' understanding, skills and knowledge in different subjects more accurately. Teachers are collecting and evaluating more evidence of pupils' learning. It is too early to measure the progress of pupils over time. Leaders are introducing this system to alternative providers.

You are changing the curriculum to promote more and quicker reintegration of primary and key stage 3 pupils to schools. You are focusing more sharply on nurture, academic learning and the skills pupils need to reintegrate in mainstream classrooms. You are developing the teaching of basic skills by extending the primary phase reading scheme to key stage 3. You have plans to introduce a similar scheme for basic skills in mathematics. You are planning to raise attainment at key stage 4 by continuing to enter as many pupils as possible for GCSE English and mathematics and by extending the range of accredited courses.

At present, too many leavers drop out of post-16 education, training or employment. You are working with the further education college and developing plans for stronger pathways and more stable transition to post-16 learning through increased opportunities for work experience, extra-curricular enrichment and college placements at key stage 4.

Over the last year, the centre reintegrated more pupils into secondary schools than previously. You are working with a new secondary schools' inclusion panel to improve procedures for excluding and reintegrating pupils. You are collecting and recording information from schools about excluded pupils more effectively, which is enabling pupils to get off to a better start.

More regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning at alternative providers have highlighted some areas for professional development. Some collaborative work is taking place to align approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. You are working with the local authority to clarify your respective responsibilities for the quality assurance of alternative providers commissioned by the local authority.

In observed lessons at the centre and at alternative providers, pupils, including Roma Slovak pupils, were engaged in purposeful learning in English, mathematics, art and design technology.

External support

The local authority has strengthened the management committee by appointing new members who provide strategic links with other stakeholders. Members bring a high level of experience and expertise from mainstream and special schools, local authority social services and finance, the careers and youth service and youth justice. These appointments have raised the profile of the centre within the wider educational community. Management committee members made a positive contribution to recruitment to the new staff structure.

The management committee is giving constructive support and challenge for leaders. One member is a national leader of education for special schools. Through Learn Sheffield, her school is contributing to staff development and making alternative provision for pupils who have autistic spectrum conditions and communication and interaction difficulties. The management committee is also contributing practical proposals to increase the numbers who stay in education, employment and training post-16.

Staff at the centre are making better use of other agencies to promote pupils' speech and language development, mental health, safety and social care.

The school improvement partner deployed by the local authority gave you expert guidance which helped you to develop strategy and prioritise actions. Peer reviews with local headteachers gave useful feedback. Your links with other schools provided helpful professional development for teaching and assessment. Learn Sheffield checks the development of the centre regularly.

The local authority has allocated funds to improve the financial and staffing stability of the centre. Work is continuing with the local authority and other stakeholders to tackle the large deficit and create a sustainable funding arrangement.

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

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector