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Mr Steve Howell
Headteacher
City of Birmingham School
The Minerva Centre
Thornthwaite Close
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Dear Mr Howell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to City of Birmingham School

Following my visit with Linda McGill, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 8 January 2019, 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.

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:

- help more pupils move onto further education, employment and training by ensuring that they leave the school with an appropriate range of accredited qualifications
- ensure that teaching is consistently strong
- improve attendance, particularly of key stage 4 pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with: you; the deputy headteacher; two members of the management committee, including the chair; and an adviser from the organisation commissioned by the local authority to support the school. I also had a telephone conversation with the school's improvement partner. The team

inspector met with three heads of the eight specialist learning centres. The focus of all these meetings was to assess the impact of actions taken to address the areas of improvement identified at the time of the last inspection.

Learning was observed in four centres. In each case this was done jointly with the respective heads of the centres. A range of documents, including the minutes of meetings of the management committee, were considered. The post-Ofsted action plan was evaluated, and the single central record was checked.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new chair of the management committee has been appointed, with the previous chair remaining as a member of the committee. A deputy head of centre, five teachers and three teaching assistants have joined the school. A part-time assistant special educational needs coordinator, three teachers, one teaching assistant and a part-time member of the premises staff have left the school.

The structure of the key stage 4 curriculum offer has been reshaped. One provision has closed, and another has opened to support the revised offer that is now in place. Fewer pupils now attend alternative provision.

Main findings

The headteacher and deputy headteacher, supported by the assistant headteachers, the heads of centres, staff and the management committee, have created a more ambitious culture across the school. There is a shared ethos with a greater focus on learning in every setting. Staff work well together across the different provisions and heads of centres now have whole-school responsibilities. This is helping to create greater consistency across the different settings.

Leaders' plans to tackle weaknesses identified in the previous Ofsted report have been used to help to improve the school. Relevant, clear and specific actions, set within an appropriate time frame, have had a positive impact on the quality of provision in the different centres. However, the post-Ofsted action plan lacks short-term quantifiable targets.

Senior leaders now have a clear overview of the quality of education provided by each centre. Information is stored centrally and analysed closely to identify trends and inform action. This is helping to further improve the school.

Leaders and managers are using their clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each centre to further improve the quality of education that they provide. Positive developments identified at the time of the last inspection have been built on and effective action has been taken to address the areas for improvement.

Leaders have taken effective action to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved in all centres. Staff have been helped to develop their practice through coaching and professional development opportunities within centres, across the school and with colleagues from other settings. Staff value the training that they have been given and are keen to continue to improve their practice. They have higher expectations of themselves and the pupils.

Curriculum leaders are directing improvements in their areas of responsibility. They oversee schemes of work, carry out curriculum reviews with senior leaders and ensure that moderation is in place. Curriculum leaders are helping to ensure that there is a more consistent approach to teaching, learning and assessment across the different centres. They hold their staff to account and, in turn, they are held to account by senior leaders. However, not all curriculum leaders are equally effective, and teaching is not yet consistently strong in all areas.

Leaders have implemented changes to the key stage 4 curriculum so that it builds on prior learning in a coherent way. After pupils have been assessed, they are now directed onto one of three pathways to ensure that they access the most appropriate provision. The school has also increased its capacity to meet the needs of Year 10 and 11 pupils by closing one provision and opening a new centre. The new centre offers a range of GCSE subjects and Level 2 vocational courses.

A wider range of qualifications has been introduced at key stage 4. All secondary centres now offer GCSE subjects and other accredited qualifications within a personalised curriculum that builds on prior knowledge. All pupils have the opportunity to study GCSE English and mathematics, biology and short course religious education (RE). They access physical education; personal, social, and health education; enrichment opportunities and life skills programmes. They also select options from computing, English literature, RE, art, health and social care, home cooking skills, and motor vehicle qualifications. This is a far more comprehensive and coherent offer than was available in the past.

Academic outcomes improved in the most recent external examinations and current pupils are making better progress than they did in the past. However, recent changes, such as the revised curriculum and more accreditation opportunities, are yet to have an impact on key stage 4 results.

Despite pupils who attend regularly, benefiting from good-quality careers education, too many pupils do not move onto further education, training and employment when they leave. Pupils' opportunities to move onto appropriate destinations in the past have been restricted by a lack of accredited qualifications.

After the last inspection, leaders took decisive action to ensure that the school only used alternative providers that offered good-quality educational opportunities

that helped pupils to gain further qualifications. Some pupils were removed from less suitable provision immediately and, after implementing a robust selection process, the number of alternative providers used has been greatly reduced. Current providers all offer English and mathematics qualifications and pupils can study a range of other academic and vocational subjects.

The quality of courses delivered by alternative providers is closely monitored by staff from the school. Each provider is visited at least once a week. Detailed records are kept, and appropriate action is taken if required. Staff from the school deliver training for providers. The revised quality assurance process closely monitors alternative provision.

Some pupils are now receiving vocational provision within the school. Leaders are currently exploring opportunities to increase their capacity to offer a range of appropriate courses to more pupils. They are working with the local authority to look at ways of further reducing the need to send pupils elsewhere for their education.

Attendance has improved since the last inspection and close analysis of absence information is leading to actions that are helping some pupils to attend more regularly. However, too many pupils, particularly in key stage 4, are frequently absent.

Members of the management committee have the skills and experience to hold leaders to close account. They have supported changes to the key stage 4 curriculum and they regularly offer challenge in meetings through their probing questions. Those responsible for governance know the school's strengths and weaknesses and responded positively to the recommendations made in the previous inspection report. Governance has improved since the time of the last inspection.

External support

Support commissioned on behalf of the local authority, and by the school, is helping leaders to improve provision. The consultants have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and ensure that regular visits focus on the school's priorities. Leaders value this effective support and challenge, which is helping them to develop their practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector