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Miss Kate Morris
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Dear Miss Morris

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Biddick Academy

Following my visit to your school on 8 March 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.

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.

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:

- improve further the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils at the end of Year 11
- continue to improve the attendance and persistent absence of all pupils, including the disadvantaged pupils
- continue to improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels so that leaders evaluate the impact of their actions more accurately.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteachers and other senior leaders. I also met with a group of governors, including the vice-chair. I discussed

the support and actions taken since the last inspection with a school improvement partner from a neighbouring local authority. I scrutinised school documentation, including the school self-evaluation document, improvement plans and other relevant documents. I conducted short visits to lessons with you and an assistant headteacher. A sample of pupils' work was reviewed alongside senior leaders. I also met with a group of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 to evaluate their views on developments since the last inspection.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been a small number of changes in staffing. A new headteacher was appointed in January 2019. A new teacher of English was appointed in September 2018 as lead practitioner in this area. Two teachers of science and a teacher of information and communication technology have left the school. Since May 2018, two members of the governing body have stepped down and two new governors have been appointed. The school is currently in the process of recruiting additional governors.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, leaders reviewed all areas of the school, identifying and prioritising areas for improvement. Since your appointment, you took further robust actions to eradicate weak teaching and challenged ineffective leadership at all levels. You reinforced your high expectations across the whole school. Together with governors, you managed staffing changes effectively and appointed experienced staff in some key areas of responsibility, including the appointment of a new lead practitioner in the English department. As a result, leadership and management have been strengthened further and the rate of school improvement is accelerating.

Leaders and governors have taken a range of appropriate actions to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Your recently reviewed improvement plans are detailed, focused and evaluated accurately against clear criteria for success. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning and the progress of pupils are improving.

Since your appointment, you have sharpened the systems and procedures senior leaders use to monitor all areas of school performance. You have raised expectations of senior leaders further and have ensured that the new school vision is clear and understood by staff at all levels. Senior leaders analyse school performance information regularly. However, they are not always able to evaluate clearly the impact of their actions on their respective areas of responsibility.

Following the findings from the last inspection, you and your leaders ensured that teachers are provided with appropriate information on pupils' prior learning. There is clear guidance for teachers on how to use this information when planning

learning activities, to meet the needs of all pupils. For example, teachers use seating plans and regularly review them, based on pupil progress. You recently introduced the 'Raise the B.A.R (Biddick Academy Routines)' standards to teaching and learning, which underpin your high expectations from all staff and pupils. You focused further the training provided to staff, to raise aspirations and make sure that these high expectations are clear. As a result, attitudes to learning and relationships between staff and pupils are positive.

During our joint visits to lessons and from the joint scrutiny of pupils' work, we were able to confirm that where pupils learn effectively, teachers plan activities that challenge all pupils, including the most able pupils. Questioning is targeted and probes pupils' knowledge and understanding. From the scrutiny of pupils' work, we were able to confirm that pupils show pride in their work and the neatness and presentation of their work have significantly improved. As a result, teaching and learning and outcomes of pupils are improving, including in English and mathematics. However, there remain inconsistencies across subjects and within departments.

School leaders have established a carefully planned cycle of checking the quality of teaching and learning in the school, through frequent visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work. You have introduced a more rigorous approach to ensuring that senior leaders' checks of the quality of teaching and learning are consistent. You have skilfully linked the progress pupils make and the quality of teaching and learning to the school's performance management processes. Consequently, there are clear priorities for improvement in each department and they are regularly reviewed.

Since your appointment, you are constantly reviewing the school's staffing structures and you have ensured that lines of accountability are clear. Staff receive appropriate training on various teaching and learning initiatives, including areas of their practice that need improving. Staff work collaboratively on developing further the effectiveness of questioning, for example through peer-to-peer lesson observations, coaching and scrutiny of pupils' work. As a result, teaching and learning are improving.

Governors are committed to the school's continuous improvement. They meet regularly and have access to detailed reports. Following the last inspection, they conducted a skills audit. Two new governors have been recruited to strengthen further the range of skills and expertise of the governing body. Governors are working closely with you to improve the lines of accountability across the school. They are involved in scrutinising school performance information. As a result, they understand better the school's strengths and weaknesses and ask focused questions, providing more rigorous challenge. An external review of governance is currently being arranged.

Since the last inspection, you have further sharpened systems for monitoring the progress pupils make. This information is used to identify pupils who underachieve, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and leaders have put in place appropriate support to help them catch up. As a result, inspection evidence, scrutiny of pupils' work and school assessment information indicate an improvement in the progress pupils make from their starting points, in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. However, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is not improving rapidly enough. You agreed with me that more work is needed in this area to ensure that disadvantaged pupils reach the standards of which they are capable, with more urgency.

School leaders implemented a revised behaviour policy in September 2018. The expectations increased further in January 2019. Pupils have responded positively and there is a calm and orderly environment around the school. Pupils talk positively about their experiences in school. Fixed-term exclusions, and repeat fixed-term exclusions, have reduced even further for all pupils, including the disadvantaged and pupils with SEND. Systems for monitoring absence and persistent absence have been refined. However, although rates of attendance and persistent absence of pupils, including the disadvantaged pupils, are improving, they are below the national average. You agreed with me that more work is needed in this area.

External support

Leaders use school improvement advisers from a neighbouring local authority for external support. Subject specialist advisers have provided support to senior and middle leaders in reviewing departmental development plans, including for English and mathematics and checking the accuracy of assessments. The school improvement partner knows the school well and provides appropriate challenge and support to senior leaders. Consequently, action plans are focused and regularly evaluated.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of Biddick Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dimitris Spiliotis
Her Majesty's Inspector