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Ms Sarah Valentine
Principal
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Dear Ms Valentine

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Buckinghamshire UTC

Following my visit to your school on 9 July 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:

- build on the improvements to teaching and learning already made to ensure that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable
- continue to reduce the rate of both fixed-term and permanent exclusions so that the school is at least in line with the national average
- continue to improve attendance levels and particularly the reduction of persistent absence.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal, other senior leaders and middle leaders, pupils and members of the governing body. We also had a telephone call with the school's department for education adviser, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I undertook short visits to lessons, accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team, and looked at work in pupils' books. A range of documentation was considered, including the school's action plan and self-evaluation, monitoring reports to the governing body and reports from the national leader of education working with the school.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been some changes to the governing body. A high number of teachers have left and have joined the school during this period. The senior leadership team has been restructured. Two additional members, with responsibility for teaching and learning and curriculum and assessment, have been appointed to the team.

Main findings

You know the school well and, with governors, are determined to make it as effective as you can to improve the life chances of the young people. Your ambition is matched to a clear understanding of where standards and progress are currently. Leaders at all levels are determined to address ongoing weaknesses. There have been some improvements, particularly this academic year. Nonetheless, there is still much to do.

School documentation is accurate and detailed. There is acknowledgement in the self-evaluation and governors' documents that much work is needed to improve outcomes further.

Pupils enter the school for the first time in Year 10. Many pupils move to the school for either a fresh start or to access a more practical and vocational curriculum. As a consequence, there is a high number of pupils on the special needs register. There is also a significant number of pupils who need additional support to improve their learning behaviours. You establish a clear entry baseline for each pupil during their first term.

The previous inspection report asked leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all teaching is consistently good by planning for the progress of all pupils from their different starting points. A number of specialist leaders of education from a teaching school have been working with departments and leaders. There is some evidence of emerging success. You have made some recent changes to the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team by appointing heads of teaching and learning and curriculum and assessment. There are early signs that

this initiative is giving additional impetus to improvements in these areas. You have established a 'Top 5' set of non-negotiable elements to the quality of a lesson. There was evidence of teachers raising their expectations and providing greater challenge to pupils during lesson visits. There is a peer-to-peer coaching and mentoring programme for teachers in place, which focuses on improving the quality of teaching. Your monitoring records show that teaching quality has improved this year. Overall, it is important to drive improvements at a faster pace so that you can achieve greater consistency.

Most of these actions are recent and it is not yet possible to judge the impact of them. Since the last inspection, there have been some marginal improvements to pupils' progress in the core subjects and, especially, in English. However, standards are not yet good enough and they are still some way off the national average.

School leaders have taken effective action to improve pupils' levels of attendance. You have appointed a new attendance lead to carefully check and follow up on pupils' regular attendance. The school uses parenting contracts and pastoral support plans to focus improvement. You have introduced the 'Perfect Week' scheme to incentivise positive behaviours and attendance. As a result, pupils' attendance levels have improved. This is particularly true of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who have an education, health and care plan. Persistent absence rates remain high but have reduced over the last year. Leaders should continue to prioritise improving attendance levels and particularly the reduction of persistent absence.

Leaders have improved pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. They have devised new systems to ensure that behaviour in lessons and around the school has improved. Pupils told me that behaviour has improved in lessons and there is now less disruption. They said that this is because pupils have been helped by staff to understand their responsibility to others. In the lessons we visited, pupils displayed positive attitudes to learning, and relationships with teachers appeared productive. The level of permanent exclusions has reduced since 2017, but it remains high when compared to the national average. Fixed-term exclusions were high during 2018 but reduced dramatically in 2019, following work with external agencies to support individual students, as well as helping staff to secure greater consistency in the application of the behaviour policy.

Pupils with whom I met formally and informally were all polite and personable. Although largely positive about the school, some pupils commented on inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. However, pupils are positive about the differences you have made as principal during their time at the school. Pupils said that teachers want the best for them and give them extra support when asked.

External support

The school is accessing support from local schools as well as Redborne teaching school. The national leader of education from Redborne has supported the principal, and specialist leaders of education have mentored both subject and senior leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Boshier

Ofsted Inspector