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26 January 2016

Mr Steve Robinson
Executive Headteacher
Birley Community College
Birley Lane
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Dear Mr Robinson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birley Community College

Following my visit to your school on 12 January 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in June 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- address the gap in progress between boys and girls, especially in the current Year 11
- introduce a rigorous cycle for governors, by which they can check the impact of actions taken to improve the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the associate headteacher, members of the senior leadership team and the Chair of the Governing Body, and a telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan and other documents provided by the school were evaluated. The associate headteacher and I undertook

a walk around the school, making brief visits to lessons and observing the behaviour of pupils at breaktime.

Context

Twelve new members of staff started in September 2015, including five newly qualified teachers.

Main findings

Following outcomes for Year 11 pupils in 2015 which were lower than you expected, you and the senior leaders understand the need to act rapidly to address the areas for improvement in order to improve outcomes for pupils currently in the school. You have developed a clear plan to address the key issues. Your checks on the implementation of the strategies you are putting into place to effect change are now more rigorous, as a result of an improved monitoring and evaluation process. Regular visits to lessons, and more detailed monitoring of subject areas, mean that you and your senior leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of teaching well. The accountability of middle leaders has improved as a result of their involvement in the quality assurance processes.

In 2015 attainment and progress in English and mathematics in the GCSE examinations were below the national average. The gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers decreased compared to the previous year, but the attainment and progress of boys remained much lower than that of girls. The school's own progress information suggests that attainment and progress for the current Year 11 will be higher in the 2016 examinations; however, the progress of boys, especially in English, remains a concern.

A range of professional development opportunities, including 'teaching and learning briefings' and 'master classes' give teachers the opportunity to share their good practice. Teachers whose practice is not yet good are supported and provided with action plans and targets for improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving.

The more consistent use of the school's marking and feedback policy is having a positive impact on pupils' learning. Pupils say they find responding to teachers' feedback helps them improve their work. This aids their understanding and challenges them to do more difficult work.

A senior leader is leading the team working to raise the profile of the most-able pupils and increase the expectations of both the pupils themselves and their teachers. The most-able pupils across the school have been clearly identified to both staff and parents. Curriculum leaders are focused on improving the challenge in lessons for the most able. Some are working closely with their counterparts at an outstanding school to develop this focus and have had the opportunity to observe good practice. Special events have been organised to raise the aspirations of the

Year 11 group through links with universities. A club is in place for Year 8, 9 and 10 higher-ability pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, to encourage them to achieve. As a result, the school's progress information shows that the most able are beginning to make better progress in English and mathematics. The quality of careers advice and guidance has improved and nearly all the pupils leaving Year 11 last summer are continuing their education or training.

Pupils in Year 7 who need to catch up with their literacy and mathematics have been identified. Catch-up funding is being used to provide programmes to help these pupils. It is too soon to see the impact.

New schemes of work in mathematics at Key Stage 3 focus on problem-solving activities. A Year 7 group were seen during the inspection to be enthusiastically engaged in solving a murder using prime and squared numbers. Training has been provided to staff to raise the profile of numeracy across the curriculum and consistent approaches to mathematical processes are being developed across different subjects and in tutor time. The school's progress information suggests there is starting to be a positive impact on the progress in mathematics.

There is a new policy for spelling and a focus on subject specific vocabulary. Some tutor times have a literacy activity. Marking stickers have been introduced for spelling. It is too soon to see the impact of this work.

The associate headteacher is leading on personal development, behaviour and welfare. The inclusion team have been reorganised so that the student support coordinators are working with discrete year groups, rather than across the school. This has made work on behaviour more straightforward. The behaviour policy is applied more consistently by teachers. The associate headteacher drives improvements in behaviour using a three-pronged approach, delivering information on a particular aspect of behaviour to staff, students and parents. As a result, behaviour has improved. These improvements could be seen during the inspection in lessons and at breaktime.

The drive to improve attendance is visible in the display in the school. Pupils are encouraged to 'get on the attendance bus'. Good attendance is rewarded and the attendance of groups more carefully monitored. A new pastoral leader has been appointed to lead the work of tutors on inclusion, including their role in monitoring attendance. These initiatives have led to slight improvements in attendance, but greater impact is needed to raise attendance, particularly of disadvantaged pupils, so that it is in line with the national average.

In the past governors have relied on the information provided by senior leaders about pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching. The governing body is now beginning to improve the way it holds senior leaders to account for the quality of teaching as a result of joining visits to lessons by the senior leadership team. However, the governors do not have a rigorous cycle to check the impact of actions taken to address the areas for improvement.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

In the summer term 2015 the school received support for mathematics from a National Leader of Education. As a result, the progress of pupils in mathematics is improving and the mathematics curriculum is more varied. Curriculum leaders are working alongside colleagues from Tapton School. Consequently, new schemes of work have been developed and the challenge in lessons for the most able has been increased. This external support was brokered by the local authority. School leaders are working closely with a national organisation to improve the way they monitor pupils' progress and the help they provide for groups of pupils to accelerate achievement. Improvements in attainment and progress in the current Year 11 demonstrate the impact of this work.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Sheffield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane
Her Majesty's Inspector