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12 June 2014

Mr D Barrowclough
Headteacher
Forge Valley Community School
Wood Lane
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S6 5HG

Dear Mr Barrowclough

Special measures monitoring inspection of Forge Valley Community School

Following my visit with Kathleen Yates and Andrew Henderson, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 10 and 11 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection, but only with my prior approval.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Interim Executive Director Children Young People and Families for Sheffield.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good and thereby raise students' achievement, including in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that all students are motivated and engaged in learning through lessons that inspire them, and fire their imagination
 - improving students' reading skills, particularly those who arrive in the school with reading abilities that are below those expected nationally
 - using data about students' progress when planning lessons so that work is matched precisely to students' different abilities.

- Improve students' behaviour and their attendance by:
 - working with parents to improve the attendance of all groups of students
 - checking on patterns of absence of the different groups of students and then developing and implementing a plan to reduce the absence
 - ensuring that all students, particularly boys, are fully involved in learning in all lessons, for example, through discussions and solving problems in groups.

- Ensure that leadership and management at all levels is effective in driving improvement by:
 - reducing teacher absence as a matter of urgency so that students' learning is not disrupted
 - making certain that school leaders at all levels track the progress of different groups of students, particularly those in receipt of pupil premium funding, disabled students and those who have special educational needs; then taking action if any students underachieve
 - making certain that senior leaders have sufficient knowledge and expertise to promote rapid improvements in the quality of teaching
 - rigorously checking the progress being made by students who receive training off the school site and by making sure that the training they do receive fully meets their learning needs
 - making certain that the management of special educational needs is highly effective so that students supported at school action and school action plus are provided with support which fully meets their needs and that managers regularly check on their progress so that any underachievement is identified quickly and changes are made.

- Ensure that the governing body is effective in challenging senior leaders on matters relating to the quality of teaching, the attendance of staff and students, the progress being made by all groups of students and the use of pupil premium funding.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management can be made fully effective.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 June 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, the headteacher and senior leaders, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Tapton School Academy Trust, a member of the local authority's school improvement team, middle leaders and individual teaching and support staff. Inspectors observed 22 full and part-lessons, two of which were conducted jointly with senior leaders. They also attended one assembly and observed one best practice training session for teaching staff. Inspectors looked at samples of students' work in classes and spoke with students in formal meetings and informally during social times.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection there have been some important changes in staffing. The new headteacher has taken up his post. As a result, the associate headteacher has returned to her previous role as deputy headteacher and the headteacher of Tapton School has relinquished his role as executive headteacher. Two assistant headteachers have been appointed to start in September 2014, both of whom will be new to the school. At the end of this term the head of sixth form at Tapton School will relinquish his post as head of sixth form at Forge Valley and this position will be subsumed into the role of the current assistant headteacher at Forge Valley responsible for students' progress at Key Stage 4. Ten staff have been appointed to begin teaching at Forge Valley in September 2014 to replace the 14 staff who have left the school since the last monitoring inspection or will be leaving the school at the end of this term. Approval has been given for the school to appoint among these teachers three newly qualified teachers from September 2014, two in science and one in design technology. The governing body has two vacancies, both of which it intends to fill early in the new academic year. The school is on course to become a sponsored academy as part of the Tapton School Academy Trust from 1 September 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The improvement in achievement noted at the previous monitoring inspection has been maintained and more students across the school are making expected and better than expected progress. As a result of the hard work of the head of sixth form and of individual subject teachers, many of whom have been supported by colleagues from Tapton School, the proportion of students achieving grades A* to B at A-level is expected to be much higher than last year. At GCSE, more students are expected to achieve five subjects at the higher grades, including English and mathematics this summer than in 2013. The proportions of students in Year 11 making expected and better than expected progress in English and mathematics are estimated to be much higher as well. As at A-level, these predicted outcomes are the result of focused teaching, rigorous tracking, the identification of those students likely to fall below their targets and the implementation of clear intervention strategies.

The school has maintained a relentless focus on improving students' achievement and the intervention tactics for supporting the current Year 11 have included after-school classes, an Easter revision camp, additional sessions at half term in May and a recent Sunday revision session. Students' attendance has varied at these sessions, but in general, the number of students turning up has shown that many of them are focused on doing their best this summer. Despite all this work, it is clear that the achievement of students supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding) is expected to fall this year. The latest assessment of students' performance suggests that the gap between the attainment of students supported by the pupil premium and those who are not will not narrow, as desired, but will actually widen, especially in English. This is most disappointing.

The assessment of progress for students in Year 10 is much more promising. It suggests that achievement should improve in 2015 in relation to the proportions of students achieving five GCSE subjects at the higher grades, including English and mathematics and the proportions making expected and more than expected progress in English and mathematics for all students, for students supported by the pupil premium students and for non-funded students. Nevertheless, senior leaders are aware that there is still much to do to ensure that the optimism in relation to results at GCSE in 2015 is turned into reality.

More students are making good progress in their lessons. At Key Stages 3 and 4, teachers are beginning to focus more effectively on challenging all students to do well. However, inspection evidence from this monitoring inspection indicates that too many of the most-able students are not making the progress of which they are capable. This is essentially because some teaching staff do not have high enough expectations and are not sure how to challenge brighter students effectively.

The quality of teaching

With students in Years 11 and 13 undertaking examinations, some teaching was observed in Year 10. Most observations of teaching, however, took place in Years 7 to 9. The quality of teaching observed continues to show improvement, with strengths in particular areas. However, a considerable amount of teaching exists which requires improvement. The school is actively looking at how it can better maximise the good and outstanding practice which exists to the benefit of all staff. The 'best practice' sessions for all teaching staff each Wednesday morning are part of this approach. The initial sessions have focused on the new marking policy and teachers report that this approach is helping to disseminate effective strategies. Senior staff are aware that more needs to be done to create a culture in which continuous training and the sharing of best practice is part of the daily diet of all teachers.

Where teaching is highly effective, inspectors observed a number of common characteristics. They included good teacher subject knowledge; the consistent application of the new marking policy, which makes it clear for students what has gone well and what precisely they need to do to improve; positive relationships between students and with staff; consistent use of the new behaviour policy, thus allowing learning to take place without disruption due to unacceptable behaviour; a focused approach to developing students' literacy, especially in relation to developing students' speaking and listening skills and requiring students to

consider how they could turn their short oral answers into full responses, which they could use later in their writing. However, not all teaching exhibits these characteristics on a regular basis. The work to improve students' writing skills and to ensure that students spend more time in lessons writing at length is continuing, but with variable impact. This is because, since his arrival, the new headteacher has highlighted more pressing priorities on which staff have to focus for the time being. Senior leaders are aware that the policy and the associated strategies to improve students' writing need to be refreshed and relaunched so that students strengthen their writing skills and are able to write at length with greater confidence. This additional area for improvement should now re-emerge as a priority.

As teaching improves and teachers become more confident in their teaching, so students are becoming more engaged in their learning. There is some good questioning of students in lessons, which probes their thinking and makes them consider different perspectives. However, opportunities to widen dialogue in lessons to allow this to happen are not always taken. Students are only gradually responding to the 'Even Better If' aspect of the new marking policy and writing their responses to what their teachers have identified as aspects for improvement. Often this is because the area identified does not always allow students to respond, because it is too general. Where this new policy is having its best impact on students' learning, teachers are identifying precise actions for the students to take in the next lesson when students are required to review and respond to the teachers' comments. Some teachers are using the assessment information provided for them effectively in their planning to challenge students and ensure that work set enables them to achieve well. In the best learning observed, clearly structured planning by the teacher, combined with this sophisticated use of the data to inform that planning, enabled students to make rapid gains in their learning. However, this is not yet the custom across the school.

While progress in improving teaching has been gradual, the impact of the new headteacher, senior leaders and external support from Tapton School is now fostering a greater momentum. Staff at all levels are increasingly buoyed in their wish to see teaching improve even further and are responding to the new strategies introduced since the last monitoring visit with conviction. As a result, a purposeful atmosphere of shared engagement is evident across the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school is successfully improving the attendance and punctuality of more students. By identifying patterns of students' attendance from the copious data available, establishing targeted intervention support for specific individuals and groups of students and their parents, and maximising the skills of the team of staff responsible for attendance, the school has maintained the picture reported at the last monitoring inspection, that attendance is slightly better and persistence absence is slightly lower than the national averages. The attendance of students in Year 11 who are eligible for support through the pupil premium, however, has given considerable cause for concern, because it has been below the national average. Senior leaders are well aware of this situation and that there is no room for complacency in their drive to improve attendance further for all students and especially for students supported by the pupil premium.

Since his arrival at the school, the new headteacher has implemented a new behaviour management policy, simplifying the system and the procedures. Staff and students report that the new approach is much clearer and that there is less disruption to lessons from low-level misbehaviour. Nevertheless, the new system is not yet being used consistently by all staff. Students move about the corridors and social areas between lessons and at break times in a calm and harmonious way. Students are clear that this is a safe school and they much appreciate the range of topics they are taught to prepare them for life beyond school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The arrival of the new headteacher has seen a marked shift in emphasis in relation to the improvement agenda at Forge Valley. In the short amount of time in which he has been in school, he has assessed the situation, identified clear priorities and put in place plans to accelerate the changes needed to help the school make rapid improvement. There is a greater clarity of expectations and procedures, especially in relation to behaviour and marking. He is working to engage all stakeholders in identifying a refreshed vision and branding for the school, which includes a new uniform from September 2014. He is keen to develop a closer relationship with the local community and to strengthen student voice across the school. The curriculum has been analysed and significant changes have been decided for next year, which will give students access to more appropriate choices. Greater opportunities have been provided for teachers to undertake focused training within their subject areas. A revised lesson observation policy has been put in place, as have new systems for the quality assurance of performance in subjects and for undertaking whole-school self-evaluation. The period since the last monitoring inspection has seen a momentum which the school has not witnessed for some time. Although it is too early to assess the full impact of many of these changes, it is clear that the headteacher has put in place a series of initiatives which bode well for the future.

The headteacher is a visible presence around the corridors and this is much appreciated by staff and students. Staff are enthusiastic about the current changes and are optimistic that they will bring about the desired improvements. Students enjoy coming to school and like the changes to behaviour management and marking. It is to the credit of the former executive headteacher, the former associate headteacher and the current headteacher that the considerable churn in senior leadership witnessed in the last year has not led to a lengthy period of uncertainty. Moreover, the various restructurings which have been undertaken have been handled with considerable sensitivity. The school would now benefit considerably from a period of stability in which the changes being introduced are allowed to embed into everyday practice.

Governors are becoming more aware of their responsibilities and of the importance of receiving regular and accurate information. They understand clearly where their strategic role ends and where the operational role of the headteacher and his staff begins. They are keen to hone their skills and receive appropriate training at each full meeting of governors. The 'in-school' days, of which there have now been five, have allowed governors to see the school at work and to engage with staff and students. All governors have attended at least one of these days. The records of governors' meetings show that governors provide support

and challenge in equal measure. They are more prepared to engage senior leaders in robust debate about key issues and are acutely aware of the need to improve achievement for all, especially pupil premium students and high achievers and to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning. The minutes of governors' meetings, however, do not always reflect the rigorous nature of the discussions that have been held.

External support

Under the direction of the former executive headteacher as its CEO, the Tapton School Academy Trust continues to provide a wide range of support for staff at Forge Valley. Focused support has been provided in English, mathematics, science and the sixth form. All subject leaders have worked with their counterparts at Tapton principally on the moderation of controlled assessments at GCSE. The former executive headteacher has continued to provide valuable support for the emerging senior leadership team. His work and that of his staff at Tapton are much valued by senior and middle leaders and governors at Forge Valley, who recognise that the support from Tapton has been pivotal in initiating many of the early improvements at Forge Valley.

The school has a good and at-arm's-length working relationship with the local authority which is represented at governing body meetings and one of its school improvement officers visits the school each term. For the time being, the authority also continues to facilitate the services of an external consultant to help monitor and evaluate the improvement agenda at the school and, in particular, to evaluate the impact of the on-going support provided by the Tapton School Academy Trust.