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25 March 2011

Mrs Sharon Bell and Mr Steve Ely
Co-Headteachers
The Darfield Foulstone School of Creative Arts
Nanny Marr Road
Darfield
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South Yorkshire
S73 9AB

Dear Mrs Bell and Mr Ely,

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Darfield Foulstone School of Creative Arts

Following my visit with Sally Kenyon HMI to your school on 23 and 24 March 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures - satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection - satisfactory

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted 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 Director of Children's Services for Barnsley.

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2011

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 21 January 2010

- Close the gap between attainment at Darfield Foulstone and the national average by:
 - making sure that students of all abilities make consistently good progress
 - improving attainment and achievement in mathematics and English.

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - making sure that teachers use information about students' prior achievement and potential in order to plan lessons that meet the needs of everyone in the class
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of assessment to enhance learning by developing more skilful questioning techniques and improving the quality of marking
 - introducing a co-ordinated approach to identifying common weaknesses in teaching across the school and providing appropriate training and development.

- Ensure that quality assurance is more robust and effective by:
 - introducing systematic and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the school's work especially teaching
 - ensuring that the self evaluation process is more incisive and accurate
 - making certain that there is a consistent approach from all managers to eradicating under-performance.

Special measures: monitoring of The Darfield Foulstone School of Creative Arts

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 March 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the co-headteachers and other nominated staff, a group of pupils, the Chair and other members of the governing body, two representatives from the local authority, the School Improvement Partner, the headteacher and other leaders from the partner school in York.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the headteacher has retired. Since January 2011, the school has been led by two acting co-headteachers who are the substantive deputy headteachers at the school. Two additional assistant headteachers have been appointed to the senior leadership team, including one who has been seconded from the local authority. Staffing has otherwise remained stable. During this visit, Year 10 pupils were out of school on work experience.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Results from external examinations taken early by pupils in Years 10 and 11 in English and mathematics indicate that while attainment is beginning to rise, significant gaps remain in their learning. An accurate system to track pupils' progress from Years 7 to 11 has been established. The most recent data suggest that Year 7 pupils are making broadly satisfactory progress relative to their starting points. While there are signs of improvement in other year groups, progress in English and mathematics remains variable. Middle-ability pupils generally make slower progress than that of their peers and the progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is inconsistent. Strategies have been implemented to raise the attainment of targeted groups of pupils. However, it is too soon to evaluate their impact on narrowing the gap in pupils' performance.

In lessons, pupils are making more rapid progress because of improvements in teaching. Learning proceeds at a brisk pace where activities engage pupils and extend their skills and knowledge through a demanding sequence of tasks. In the best lessons, pupils work independently on challenges that test their knowledge and enable them to apply it to new situations. For example, Year 9 pupils were fully engaged in the investigation of a murder scene enquiry and making decisions about the types of test required to assess the value of different types of evidence. Learning slows where teachers dominate lessons for too long or where tasks do not meet the full range of needs. This is particularly the case for pupils with special educational needs because teachers do not refer to the information they have and use it consistently to tailor activities appropriately.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement:

- Close the gap between attainment at Darfield Foulstone and the national average
– satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' attitudes to learning have improved since the last inspection. They have responded well to the raised expectations both of behaviour and for learning, and are positive about changes that give them greater voice in decision-making. Pupils enjoy and value the new rewards policy as reflected in a Year 9 assembly, where pupils burst spontaneously into applause to celebrate recent achievements. Behaviour continues to improve in lessons and around school although occasionally, inappropriate language and poor behaviour is allowed to continue unchecked. Attendance remains broadly in line with the national average and a more rigorous approach to monitoring is improving pupils' punctuality to school in the morning.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has improved significantly. No inadequate teaching was observed during the inspection and the school's records indicate that the remaining weaknesses in teaching are being tackled robustly. The format for lesson-planning has been revised by subject leaders and is used consistently by staff. However, planning does not routinely indicate how additional adults will support individuals who require extra support and opportunities are missed to make cross-curricular links, for example, to develop literacy skills. Questioning is used well in a greater proportion of lessons to test pupils' understanding and enable them to reflect on their learning. Pupils generally know their targets and what they need to do to improve. However, learning objectives do not always identify how pupils will achieve their next learning target and this reduces opportunities for them to work independently. Activities are not always broken down sufficiently to help pupils build their skills and knowledge incrementally and, occasionally, tasks lack challenge so pupils are unable to make the progress that they might. Pupils report that feedback from their teachers is more helpful. A scrutiny of pupils' work highlighted examples of useful feedback in English and mathematics that pinpoints exactly how pupils can reach the next steps in their learning.

Improvements in teaching have been underpinned by strong leadership at senior level. Leaders are no longer reliant on external support because rigorous and sustainable systems have been established to evaluate the impact of coaching and professional development on teachers' practice. The established work of the 'Transforming Learning' group is being extended so that good practice can be shared more effectively across the school. The contribution of specialist subjects continues to support improvements in teaching well. Nevertheless, leaders recognise that there is no time for complacency and that the challenge remains for the school to demonstrate that improvements in teaching are sustained and having the desired impact on accelerating progress and raising attainment.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The co-headteachers have communicated a very clear joint vision for school improvement and have won the confidence of staff and pupils in a short time. A whole-school focus on raising expectations and building pupils' confidence has generated an environment that is more conducive to learning. Senior roles and responsibilities have been amended following changes to senior leadership and the school improvement plan has been adapted to reflect the school's changing needs. Well-supported by leaders from the partner school and additional external support, senior leaders are tackling priorities with renewed energy and enthusiasm. Consequently, further improvement has been secured, for example in the quality of teaching and learning.

Analyses of data provide senior leaders with an overview of pupils' progress towards long-term challenging targets and enable subject leaders to track the progress made by individuals in their subject areas. However, senior and middle leaders are less clear about the small steps that are required to close gaps in pupils' performance in the medium term. This means that opportunities are sometimes missed to implement the necessary strategies to accelerate progress further. The role of additional adults who support learning in lessons is under development. At present, the school does not have a clear view of their impact on accelerating pupils' progress.

Middle leaders are beginning to hold their teams to account for the performance of pupils in different classes. They are using the outcomes of recent department evaluations to adapt their action plans so that they match more closely the school's priorities. However, while actions are relevant, success criteria are not always focused sharply enough on intended outcomes for pupils. Furthermore, plans do not all identify the measures of progress that will demonstrate the impact of actions taken on accelerating progress and raising attainment.

The governing body provides a good balance between challenge and support and has a clear understanding of the school's priority to raise pupils' attainment. Members of the governing body have also taken on responsibility on the temporary governing body that is overseeing the longer-term plans for the school as it approaches closure in summer 2012.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement:

- Ensure that quality assurance is more robust and effective - satisfactory

External support

The local authority has continued to support the school well during a period of change. While school leaders are building their capacity to secure sustainable improvement, they

acknowledge that external support remains an important component in their planning. The additional support provided by the partner school has been highly-valued and targeted effectively to support leaders who are new to their roles. The School Improvement Partner has supported improvements in the quality of teaching and in developing the self-evaluation skills of middle leaders. Local authority officers hold leaders to account for pupils' progress but acknowledge that leaders could be more selective in the data being used to demonstrate that gaps are closing in pupils' performance.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that assessment information is used consistently and incisively:
 - to focus teachers' planning on the small steps in learning that will help to accelerate pupils' progress further
 - to enable pupils to identify for themselves, the progress they have made and how they can improve further
 - by leaders to demonstrate the impact of actions taken on accelerating progress towards challenging long-term targets.