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

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birley Community College, Sheffield

Following my visit to your school on 13 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- improve outcomes in mathematics and science
- use rigorous monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the wide range of initiatives put into place are having the appropriate impact
- include data for key groups and show levels of progress in the overview of data which is used to report current attainment and achievement to governors and senior leaders.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the associate headteacher, the senior leadership team, a group of teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and 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 took HMI on a tour of the school.

Context

There are seven new teachers including a deputy headteacher and two newly qualified teachers. There is new leadership in science.

In September 2013 the school became a foundation school as part of the co-operative trust.

There is a new management information system.

Main findings

Senior leaders have tackled the areas for improvement with energy, enthusiasm and vision. The action plan describes key actions, with success criteria and milestones which allow the impact of developments to be monitored. The Chair of the Governing Body understands the need to hold senior leaders to account for the impact of key actions at his regular meetings with them.

The school has a planned programme of professional development focussed on the areas for improvement. This is held in high regard by teachers who recognise that leaders have listened to them by organising helpful training through teaching and learning communities. There are support packages for teachers whose practice is not yet good. A new assessment policy has been introduced which will help students to improve their work. This now needs to be used consistently well. There is a monitoring and evaluation schedule which includes learning walks, formal observations, work scrutiny and students' views. It is essential that the impact of improvements is rigorously monitored through this process.

Tracking of students' progress has improved. The local authority reported that it had improved 'beyond recognition'. The school is tracking progress of groups and the overview provided to senior leaders and governors needs to reflect this. A senior leader has responsibility for tracking pupil premium students and has a team of five teachers supporting and mentoring these students.

There has been a focus on literacy with training, specific literacy marking strategies and testing for reading ages. Students who need extra help are provided with support to accelerate their literacy skills.

Clarity about roles in the inclusion team, linked to new policies and procedures have resulted in improved punctuality, attendance and behaviour. There is a new behaviour and rewards policy, backed up by better recording and monitoring. The inclusion team have received appropriate training and the internal exclusion room is providing a better environment to improve behaviour and reduce fixed term exclusions. Staff spoke very highly of these improvements. The school is working hard to enhance community perception through its co-operative trust and a parental community engagement co-ordinator. Recent questionnaires suggest an improvement in parents' views of the school. Staff say that the new systems, coupled with improved behaviour and better feedback are improving the culture in the school and the aspiration of students.

Results have dropped this year with a fall in 5 grade A* to C including English and mathematics. Whilst attainment and progress in English has held up, outcomes in mathematics and science have not improved. In order to become a good school it is imperative that strong action is taken to drive up attainment and achievement in these subjects. There is a specialist leader of education working with science and a link with an outstanding school to support mathematics. Strategic overstaffing will allow better targeted intervention in year 11 in these subjects. Better tracking and more rigorous progress reviews should lead to desired improvements.

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

External support

The local authority has a strong relationship with the school and worked with leaders to write the action plan. The local authority undertook an audit of the provision for pupil premium students in the summer term 2013, with recommendations for improvement. It has supported the development of the inclusion team.

The executive headteacher has brokered useful support from other schools to assist with improvements in mathematics and science. High quality consultants are used for training and review.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane

Her Majesty's Inspector