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20 June 2014

Mr Richard Bain
Headteacher
Sandhill View School
Grindon Lane
Thornley Close
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR3 4EN

Dear Mr Bain

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Sandhill View School

Following my visit to your school on 19 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in December 2013. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Executive Director of People's Services for Sunderland.

Yours sincerely

David Brown

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better, by:
 - using assessment information more precisely so that learning challenges students to build on their existing knowledge, skills and understanding
 - ensuring that there are more frequent opportunities for students to talk to each other, discuss their ideas and develop more thoughtful responses to questions
 - ensuring that all students are given regular opportunities to respond to marking and feedback from teachers by extending the recent initiatives led by the English department.

- Improve the progress students make and raise levels of attainment, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that teaching in mathematics is of a consistently good or better quality, challenging students' thinking and deepening their knowledge of mathematical concepts
 - ensuring that the impact of programmes designed to accelerate the progress of some students is checked more frequently
 - making a more concerted effort to ensure that opportunities for students to use and apply mathematics across the curriculum are embedded into programmes of study.

- Improve students' attitudes to learning, by:
 - listening more closely, and responding to, the views of students and staff about how behaviour can be improved and disruptions to learning can be minimised
 - ensuring that staff apply the school policy on behaviour management consistently
 - further raising students' awareness about the negative impact of homophobic language.

- Increase the impact of school leaders at all levels on raising achievement, by:
 - ensuring that priorities identified by the school are sharply focused on improving teaching and raising achievement, with shorter timescales for evaluating their success
 - using a wider range of evidence when making checks on the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that strategies to raise the attainment of students supported by the pupil premium have greater impact
 - broadening the range of checks undertaken by governors so that they are fully aware of the impact of strategies to narrow attainment gaps and to support lower-attaining students in Years 7 and 8

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19 June 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the work of the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning, including observing five part-lessons jointly with a senior leader. The inspector scrutinised documents, including the school action plan, together with minutes of the governors' challenge group and senior leaders' evaluations of student progress, the quality of teaching, student behaviour and attendance. The inspector met with a group of Year 10 students, the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders for English, mathematics and science, the Chair and six other members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.

Context

The school is currently in the process of seeking academy status in partnership with the Southmoor Academy Trust. The headteacher will retire at the end of the summer term 2014 and will be replaced by an acting headteacher, currently the Principal of Southmoor Academy, who will spend the majority of his working week at the school until a permanent appointment is made. A new head of science was appointed in April 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

There are signs of improvement in the work of the school but senior leaders recognise, correctly, that there is still some way to go to secure the required improvements. The headteacher and deputy headteacher now have a clearer view of what needs to be done to improve learning at the school and have eradicated the majority of the remaining inadequate teaching through a process of more rigorous monitoring and better targeted support. However, inspection evidence confirms that the progress of students is still limited by a lack of challenge in some lessons; although students report that they have noticed a positive change in the 'culture of learning' in the school and say that they enjoy more of their lessons now than previously.

There have been more notable improvements in the capacity and quality of many middle leaders, especially in English, mathematics and science. These leaders are now more able to take responsibility for the moderation of students' work and improving the quality of teaching within their curriculum areas. However, this increased responsibility needs to be extended promptly to all middle leaders in the school so that all staff are held accountable for the quality of their work and inconsistencies in the implementation of school policies, for example, those relating to marking and behaviour, can be eradicated.

Systems for gathering information about students' progress have improved. This means that leaders and governors now have a more reliable view of students' achievement. Nevertheless, teachers' checks on students' progress in some subject areas continue to be inconsistent and this can slow progress.

The governors' challenge group is beginning to show its effectiveness in holding senior and middle leaders to account. The group receives regular reports from middle leaders, particularly in English and mathematics, but their main source of information is still through the headteacher. Governors need to be more actively involved with senior and middle leaders so that they have more direct evidence of how weaknesses are being addressed across the school.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers whose teaching is less than good are being provided with personalised training and support to help them to improve. Teachers' performance targets are now sharper and linked more directly to their work in the classroom and the progress of their students.
- Middle leaders are taking more responsibility for the work of teachers and the accuracy of assessment information. Schemes of work have been reviewed to ensure that activities are sufficiently challenging for students in all years and of all abilities.
- Students' work books, especially in English, show that marking is more focused and gives more opportunities for students to respond to teachers' comments on their work.
- Behaviour is improving and students report that they have noticed better behaviour both in lessons and around the school, although a small number of staff do not apply the school policy on behaviour management consistently. Students in Year 10 welcome the introduction of teachers as 'adoptive parents' as this allows them personal support from an individual teacher.
- Governors are now more frequently involved in monitoring the quality of learning and achievement through regular challenge meetings. They are now better able to identify the school's strengths and the areas that need to be improved to raise students' achievement.
- Students' attendance is improving and is now broadly in line with national figures for all year groups.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

The following key areas require urgent attention and will be reviewed fully by Her Majesty's Inspector at the next monitoring visit:

- Teaching is improving but across the school it remains too variable. More needs to be done to ensure that the quality of teaching improves much more rapidly and more securely.
- There is a lack of consistency in the way teachers use information about students' prior learning to plan lessons that meet the needs of students of different abilities. Consequently, in some lessons, progress is limited because there is not enough challenge and questions are not used effectively to check that students understand what is being taught.
- The school has been reluctant to ensure that work to improve the quality of teaching and raise students' progress has been externally validated. This has slowed the impact of this work and makes support and challenge from governors less effective.
- The gap in attainment between those students supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding) and those who are not is closing, but not fast enough.

External support

The school and local authority have brokered a substantial range of support since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses. The heads of the English, mathematics and science departments have received support from local authority consultants from Durham and further support has been provided from the Harton Teaching School Alliance and from Southmoor Academy in the areas for improvement identified in the inspection. It is too early to detect the impact of much of this work.