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Dr Phil Ingram
Acting Headteacher
Sandhill View School
Grindon Lane
Thorney Close
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR3 4EN

Dear Dr Ingram

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Sandhill View School

Following my visit to your school on 9 December 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 third 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 third monitoring inspection on 9 December 2014

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) examined the work of the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning, including observing three lessons, and scrutinised a number of documents including the updated school action plan. HMI met with the acting headteacher and members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and six other members, six members of staff and two representatives of the local authority. He met informally with several groups of students to discuss recent changes in the school.

Context

The school is currently in the process of seeking academy status in partnership with the Southmoor Academy Trust. The substantive headteacher retired at the end of the summer term 2014 and has been replaced by an acting headteacher who is the current Principal of Southmoor Academy. The deputy headteacher has left the school. A new head of modern foreign languages joined the school in September 2014. Two new deputy headteachers, together with new heads of humanities and visual and performing arts will join the school in January 2015. A number of teaching staff have left or are about to leave the school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Results in the 2014 GCSE examinations were significantly lower than in the previous year. The extent of this decline was not anticipated by the previous school leadership. However, since his appointment, the acting headteacher is working decisively to tackle the issues identified in the inspection report and in previous monitoring inspection letters. With the full support of the governing body, he is taking authoritative and urgent action to improve the quality of leadership and teaching in the school.

A detailed evaluation of all provision has been undertaken and a curriculum more appropriate and challenging for students of all abilities is being adopted. An additional action plan has been written, which rightly prioritises making improvements to standards of students' literacy. Lesson observations confirm that this is beginning to raise the aspirations of both teachers and students.

Performance data collected and analysed by leaders are now more accurate and middle leaders and teachers have a much better view of how well students are progressing. Current school information indicates that achievement is rising, albeit from a very low base. However, inspection evidence confirms that the progress of students is still limited by a lack of challenge and an acceptance of poorly presented written work in some lessons.

The governors' challenge group is now better able to hold senior and middle leaders to account. The group receives regular progress reports directly from middle leaders in mathematics and English.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers are very positive about the regular opportunities to work with colleagues from Southmoor Academy. This partnership is having a clear impact on the work of the mathematics department where an increase in challenge has led to enhanced students' engagement.
- Behaviour both in and out of lessons has continued to improve. Students report that better behaviour in lessons is allowing them to focus on their work without disruption and that incidences of bullying are far less frequent. The school now offers a range of activities to engage students over the lunch break.
- The school has worked closely with parents and students to improve attendance and punctuality to school. Attendance is now close to the national average for all year groups.
- Staff morale is generally good because teachers recognise that the acting headteacher is making important and necessary improvements at the school.
- Governors are actively involved in monitoring the quality of learning and student achievement through regular challenge meetings. Governors are determined to hold senior and middle leaders to account to ensure that the school improves rapidly and securely.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teaching is improving but across the school remains too variable. More needs to be done to ensure that the quality of teaching improves much more rapidly and securely in all subject areas.
- In some lessons, progress is limited because learning is too slow and the work set lacks challenge. At times, teachers praise students when this is not appropriate and, occasionally, opportunities to celebrate high quality work are missed. Further work is required to raise the aspirations of both teachers and students.
- The gap in attainment between those students in receipt of support through pupil premium and other students is closing, but not fast enough.

External support

The school has received significant support from senior and middle leaders at Southmoor Academy. Teachers from both schools benefit from regular opportunities to work together. Leaders and teachers from the English, mathematics and science departments have received support from local authority consultants from Durham. It is too early to detect the impact of much of this work.