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Dear Simon Robertson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Aylestone Business and Enterprise College

Following my visit to your school on 20 October 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 January 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Meetings took place with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders, the pupil premium coordinator, pupils, and the chair and members of the governing body. A telephone discussion took place with a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan and monitoring information were evaluated and minutes of recent governing body meetings were scrutinised.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection, a pupil premium coordinator has been appointed and the governing body has been restructured.

Main findings

You are driving improvement by raising the expectations and ambition of your staff and pupils. Your outward looking approach is encouraging other school leaders and staff to be more open to change. This is reflected in the valuable improvement work being done with local high performing schools and with other external agencies. School plans to tackle the areas requiring improvement are detailed, cover appropriate timescales, and have clear success criteria.

Middle leaders are taking a more proactive role in improving teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' outcomes in their subject areas. Monitoring and quality assurance systems are now more uniform and this is helping to improve accountability at subject level. Expectations of middle leaders are much clearer and this ensures they are more confident in their roles. Many initiatives are now being undertaken to share the best practice in teaching, learning and assessment that is available across subjects. These changes are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and on pupils' outcomes.

Approaches to the presentation of pupils' work, and to marking and feedback, are now implemented more consistently across subjects. Pupils comment positively on how this is helping them improve their work. You have taken practical and effective steps to ensure that all pupils are taught by specialist mathematics teachers. Pupils appreciate the improved mathematics teaching they receive.

Regular pupil progress meetings, involving leaders with pastoral and academic responsibilities, are now held for every year group. These meetings review the performance of all pupils in a year group who are underachieving, as well as the performance of every disadvantaged pupil in that year group. Consideration goes beyond academic achievement and involves a review of pastoral issues, including attendance, behaviour and safeguarding. Appropriate support and interventions result, although it is too early to evaluate the impact of these.

Provisional data indicates that the achievement of Year 11 pupils in 2016 is not as strong as the school anticipated. This data indicates that differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school and nationally are beginning to diminish. However, these differences are still too great.

School information indicates that a range of strategies to improve the attendance of all pupils, and in particular disadvantaged pupils, is beginning to have a positive impact. Leaders recognise that over time, they need to do more to evaluate the impact of these strategies in order to determine how effective they are.

An external review of the use and impact of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding was organised promptly following the section 5 inspection. The review has led to much more rigorous tracking of the performance of pupils eligible for this funding and more targeted support for them. This includes: the appointment of a pupil premium coordinator to monitor the performance of disadvantaged pupils across the school; the performance of every disadvantaged pupil in each year group now being reviewed at pupil progress meetings; and every disadvantaged pupil now being supported by their own personal learning mentor. These initiatives are providing the school with more information about the barriers that these pupils face. This in turn is helping leaders to identify how to improve teaching and learning and pastoral support so that the academic progress and attendance of this group of pupils improve. It is too early to identify the impact of these initiatives.

The speedily commissioned external review of governance resulted in significant changes to the governing body. A new chair of the governing body was appointed and a subsequent audit of skills resulted in a number of new governors being appointed to fill the gaps in skills identified. The new committee structure and link governor roles ensure that all governors have a key responsibility and focus more sharply on priorities for development. Their school visits are purposeful and their monitoring schedule is linked directly to that of the school. Minutes of recent governing body meetings indicate that governors are beginning to challenge school leaders more effectively. In turn, you and your senior and middle leaders are open to such challenge in order to move the school forward.

Safeguarding is effective and the school is thorough in its approach to supporting vulnerable pupils. Leaders have established strong links with multi-agency support services and are vigilant in their work to keep pupils safe. Protocol for dealing with absent pupils ensures that prompt and effective communication takes place to encourage attendance and to ensure that pupils are safe. Since the last section 5 inspection, actions have been taken to improve provision to ensure that pupils understand the risks they face, particularly in relation to extremism and radicalisation. This has involved coverage through the curriculum, assemblies, and also via specifically focused leaflets for pupils and for their parents.

External support

The local authority monitors the performance of the school and has provided funding to assist you and your staff in working with other high performing schools. This includes support from John Masefield High School on raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, support from John Kyrle High School on improving teaching and learning in mathematics, and support from Fairfield High School to further develop the skills of middle leaders.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Herefordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector