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Mr Simon White
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Dear Mr White

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Siddal Moor Sports College

Following my visit to your school on 12 February 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. This inspection has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- reduce rates of absence for all pupils, but particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- ensure that teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
- ensure that leaders fully embed the systems to manage pupils' behaviour to reduce further the proportion of pupils who are excluded from school
- ensure that governors hold leaders to account consistently and effectively for

their actions.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met yourself as the interim headteacher and a national leader of education (NLE) who is providing support to the school. I also met formally with other senior leaders, a group of teachers and three members of the governing body. During these meetings, I discussed the impact of the actions leaders and governors have taken since the last inspection. I also spoke formally with a group of pupils and observed pupils informally during social times.

I visited lessons across different subjects, including in mathematics, and I looked at work in pupils' books. I evaluated the school's improvement plan, as well as the external review of pupil premium funding. I considered a range of school documentation, including leaders' records of attendance and behaviour. I also reviewed the school's single central record of checks on the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers to work with pupils.

Context

Following the previous inspection, the local authority commissioned support from a national teaching school. This support began in January 2018. The national teaching school continues to provide support. An NLE and three specialist leaders of education are currently providing support in mathematics and English. An external review of pupil premium funding was carried out in February 2018.

You were appointed as an interim headteacher in January 2018. Since the previous inspection, a deputy headteacher has left the school. You have since reassigned the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team. A new leader of mathematics has been appointed at middle leadership level. There have also been changes to staffing in some subjects.

Main findings

Leaders and governors recognise that there is much work to do to ensure that the school provides a good standard of education for pupils. This is because, following the last inspection, standards across the school declined. Some senior leaders had the knowledge and skills required to improve the school. However, there were endemic weaknesses in the senior leadership team and a lack of clarity around leaders' roles and responsibilities.

The decline in standards at the school is reflected in pupils' outcomes. In 2018, too many pupils made poor progress from their starting points. Examination results for key stage 4 show that pupils' rates of progress remained in the bottom 20%

nationally. This was the case in English, mathematics, science and humanities. This was particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils as leaders have made insufficient improvements for this group. For example, in English and mathematics the differences between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally increased.

There were improvements in outcomes for pupils in some subjects. For instance, pupils who left the school in 2018 made better progress in art, dance and drama than at the time of the previous inspection. Overall, middle-ability pupils who left the school in 2018 made greater gains in their learning than those who left the year before. However, pupils across the school still made significantly less progress than their peers nationally.

The governing body knew about the weaknesses in senior leadership and they took action to strengthen this aspect of the school. For example, following the last inspection, governors worked alongside the local authority to secure your appointment as interim headteacher. Governors now have an accurate understanding of the weaknesses of the school. They recognise that outcomes for pupils are not good enough. Individual governors are linked to different aspects of the school. This has been particularly effective in improving the level of challenge that governors provide to leaders. Increasingly, governors are holding leaders to account for their actions. Nonetheless, there are still times when governors do not hold senior leaders to account diligently enough.

Improving pupils' rates of attendance was an area that inspectors identified at the previous inspection. Following the last inspection, there was a marked increase in pupils' rates of absence. During the nine months that followed, too many pupils were regularly absent from school. This was especially true of disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND. For instance, during the last academic year over a quarter of disadvantaged pupils were regularly absent from school. Although rates of attendance for disadvantaged pupils are beginning to improve, rates of absence for this group of pupils remain too high. Pupils with SEND are also more likely to be regularly absent from school than their peers. This is having a negative effect on the progress that this group of pupils make.

At the previous inspection, inspectors also asked leaders to improve pupils' behaviour. The systems that were in place to help staff to manage pupils' behaviour were ineffective. This meant that staff were unable to improve pupils' attitudes to learning. Consequently, pupils' behaviour deteriorated further so that the proportion of pupils excluded from school for a fixed period increased.

The review of pupil premium recommended at the last inspection took place four months later. The actions that leaders took following this review were unsuccessful in securing better outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in 2018. Overall, the progress

made by disadvantaged pupils declined. This group of pupils made significantly less progress than other pupils nationally. This was particularly the case in English.

More recently, leaders have made considerable changes to how additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is spent and how the impact of this funding is measured. The senior leader responsible for pupil premium funding is incisive in her approach. There are clear strategies in place and leaders regularly review and refine their actions. This means that the support provided by staff for these pupils is increasingly effective. However, some disadvantaged pupils are unable to benefit from this extra support. This is because they continue to be absent from school. As a result, wide differences in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils at the school and other pupils nationally remain.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of what needs to be done. Following your appointment and with support from a national teaching school, there is capacity to improve the school at senior leadership level. Plans to improve aspects of the school are sharp and precise, with quantifiable measures of impact. For example, leaders ensure that those eligible pupils benefit from catch-up funding in Year 7. Pupils are identified quickly when they join the school. They benefit from appropriate help with their literacy and numeracy. Leaders check that catch-up funding is used well and, if necessary, they make changes to how they spend this funding.

Senior and middle leaders are under no illusion about the extent of the task that lies ahead of them. Since your appointment as interim headteacher, you have taken swift action to stem the decline in standards and begin to improve the school. With the support of a strengthened leadership team, you are winning the support of staff and pupils. You have been honest with staff about the need to secure rapid improvement. Staff feel that leaders listen to and respond well to their concerns. Staff morale is improving. Pupils and staff explained to me how they are confident that the school is 'getting better'.

You have prioritised well, stabilised staffing and implemented effective systems and procedures. For example, you have introduced a new system to manage pupils' behaviour. The staff I spoke with explained that, following recent changes to the behaviour system, staff are dealing with incidents of poor behaviour more effectively. Staff believe that the new behaviour system is giving them the opportunity to have higher expectations of pupils. An increasing proportion of pupils demonstrate consistently positive attitudes to learning. School information shows that the proportion of pupils excluded for a fixed period is beginning to decrease. However, the proportion of pupils excluded from school remains high.

Recent improvements in pupils' behaviour mean that there is a renewed and energetic focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Rigorous systems to check on the quality of teaching are now in place. Leaders use

findings from their observations of teaching to help identify suitable training for staff. Leaders check that teachers use accurate assessment information to plan learning. Work in pupils' books shows that some teachers are using this information well to challenge pupils. Nonetheless, there is still variation in how effectively teachers use this information.

Some teachers support pupils successfully. They use questioning well to probe pupils' understanding and provide clear explanations that help pupils to overcome misconceptions. In some classes, pupils are given time to reflect on their learning and improve their work. This was particularly evident in mathematics. However, despite some improvements in the quality of teaching, some teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough. For example, there are times when teachers accept work from pupils that is of low quality or incomplete. Moreover, while some teachers are providing opportunities to write at length, this is inconsistent across the school.

There is no doubt that pupils, staff and governors are more determined than ever to make Siddal Moor Sports College a good school. Standards at the school have turned a corner. However, leaders and governors acknowledge that there is considerable work to do in order for the school to be good. A number of the issues that inspectors identified at the previous inspection are still evident.

External support

Leaders at every level are keen to benefit from and act effectively on recommendations made following external support. The school is receiving a range of support from a national teaching school, including the support of an NLE. The support provided by the NLE has ensured that the school has a more effective staffing structure to build upon. However, external support has not yet had sufficient impact on the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and pupils' rates of attendance.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Rochdale. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory
Her Majesty's Inspector