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17 April 2015

Mr Stephen Griffiths
Headteacher
Bedlingtonshire Community High School
Palace Road
Bedlington
Northumberland
NE22 7DS

Dear Mr Griffiths

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Bedlingtonshire Community High School

Following my visit to your school on 16 April 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, Chair of the Governing Body, a group of senior leaders and middle leaders. A telephone conversation was conducted with the Director of Education for Northumberland and a short meeting was held with a group of students. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection an acting head of English and a Key Stage 3 coordinator have been appointed. The Department for Education has informed the school that it is likely to become a sponsored academy.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher, senior, middle leaders and governors have fully accepted the section 5 inspection report. Following the judgement, they immediately amended the school improvement plan to embed the recommendations made by inspectors fully. The detailed action plan includes relevant improvement priorities. It contains a wide range of measurable targets that governors can use to check on the impact of actions taken. Targets to narrow the gap between the achievements of students entitled to support through the pupil premium (additional government funding) and other students in the school are not challenging enough. Leaders are currently reviewing the plan to improve matters. The plan is also being amended to ensure that current baselines and comparable national data are included, so governors can check more clearly how well students are doing in the school compared to previous years and to other students nationally.

A range of actions has been taken to improve middle leadership. Senior leaders have sharpened their support and training for middle leaders. Collectively they have set out to tackle weaknesses in marking, teaching and students' progress across the school. Senior and middle leaders spoke convincingly of how they and their teams are being held to account more robustly for the progress of students in lessons through regular pupil progress meetings between leaders and staff. The marking policy has been reviewed and implemented and teachers are now marking students' work in accordance with school policy. Middle leaders are checking that this is taking place. They have been suitably trained in monitoring learning in lessons and reviewing students' books to evaluate the impact of learning over time in books as well as checking compliance with the marking policy. Senior leaders report positively about improvements in teaching, marking, assessment and the more effective deployment of learning assistants. These changes are relatively new and students who met with the inspector report they have yet to see a discernible difference in lessons.

Governors continue to develop their skills in holding leaders to account. They have a clear understanding of what needs to improve and, like senior and middle leaders, have been fully involved in the amendments to the improvement plan. The Governors' Steering Group, set up before the inspection, has become a key conduit for checking and challenging leaders on the actions being taken and the required improvements. They meet regularly and demand detailed information on the attainment, progress, attendance and exclusions of students across the school, including groups such as students entitled to free school meals and students with special educational needs. However, the required review of the use and impact of the pupil premium funding has been delayed slightly as a result of availability of the lead personnel who is undertaking it. This is now planned for later in the month.

The local authority's statement of action and underpinning action plans align effectively to the school's improvement plan and there are clear mechanisms in place to hold the school to account for the actions through half-termly challenge and

improvement meetings. The first meeting has yet to take place, but it is due before the end of this half term. Local authority senior leaders continue to meet with the Chair of the Governing Body and senior staff and have deployed experienced school improvement staff to challenge and support the school. They have also successfully brokered the support from an outstanding academy, Shotton Hall; an academy in a similar context to Bedlingtonshire. Senior and middle leaders are also working with the outstanding Cardinal Hume Academy in Gateshead. Some have visited outstanding practice in these schools. It is too early to see the impact of this work.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector