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Mr Toby Eastaugh
Headteacher
Netherwood Advanced Learning Centre
Dove Valley Way
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South Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Eastaugh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Netherwood Advanced Learning Centre, Barnsley

Following my visit with David Hoare, Chair of Ofsted, to your school on 18 November 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings. Thank you for the help you gave us 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 July 2014. 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 recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- improve the consistency of marking and feedback so it increases the rate of students' progress in all subjects
- ensure actions taken to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students, including the 'Year 11 Challenge', are robust and are monitored to check they are boosting progress.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and other documentation provided by the school were evaluated. You took me, accompanied by the Chair of Ofsted, on a tour of the school.

Context

Twelve teachers started in September 2014 and two assistant principals were appointed to the leadership team. The governing body has been reorganised and the number of governors reduced. The plan for the school to become an academy has been delayed.

Main findings

You provide strong and effective leadership and are well supported by the senior team. You clearly understand the extent of what needs to be done to improve the school and the limited time available to embed change. The school improvement plan is concise and addresses the areas for improvement effectively. The plan was jointly written by senior and middle leaders and governors, with contributions from the local authority representative.

Plans are in place to improve the quality of teaching through a programme of professional development. As part of this plan, a group of teachers shared good practice at a recent training event, helping other colleagues to understand how to provide work which matches students' differing needs. Further work is planned to link this training to marking and feedback, the quality of which is too variable. Where students are expected to respond to feedback they say this process is helping them to learn. More rigorous performance management structures, linked to students' progress and the Teachers' Standards, demonstrate the high expectations of the school's leaders and governors. Those teachers whose practice is not yet good are being provided with personalised programmes of support and challenge. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this support.

The new behaviour and rewards policy is having a positive impact on learning. As a result of teachers' higher expectations of behaviour, students are beginning to show better attitudes to learning which were evidenced during visits to classrooms. School records also show that behaviour is improving. Attendance has risen, in particular that of Year 11 and disadvantaged students, as a result of effective school procedures to monitor absence.

The rigour of leaders' monitoring and evaluation of the school's work is improving and consequently they are better informed about where their actions are having the intended impact. The skills of middle leaders are being developed as a result of joint lesson observations with an external consultant and with senior leaders. Middle leaders are now better able to judge the quality of teaching and how progress can be measured over time. The feedback and challenge provided to teachers by middle leaders is also beginning to improve.

Expectations about student progress have also been raised. Discussions between teachers and their line managers check that students are making at least expected progress, with challenging targets for around a third of students to exceed this measure. Teachers know which students are eligible for pupil premium funding and a 'Year 11 Challenge' has begun in which some of these students are mentored weekly by teachers. School data show that the gap in progress between disadvantaged students and others is closing across the school. To narrow this gap is a high priority for the school. In the GCSE examination results in 2014, the gap between disadvantaged students and others was well above the national average. Disadvantaged students attained two grades lower than their peers in both English and mathematics. The school recognises the urgent need to improve the achievement of

disadvantaged students at Key Stage 4, so that they make rapid progress and gain ground on their peers.

The Governors have a detailed plan to monitor the impact of actions taken to address the areas for improvement, including first-hand opportunities for governors to collect evidence. Governors have monitored the impact of improvements in science through student voice and work scrutiny. The governors involved were able to support the view that attitudes to learning and behaviour are improving.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority representative provides very effective support and challenge. This includes brokering the additional support of an external consultant to work with middle leaders. You make good use of expertise in other schools and in the teaching school alliance to support improvement work. In partnership with other secondary school leaders, you are part of the new Barnsley 'Alliance Board' which provides school-to-school support. It is too soon to identify any impact of this initiative.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Barnsley.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane
Her Majesty's Inspector