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Ms Janina Taylor
Associate Principal
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Dear Ms Taylor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Corby Business Academy

Following my visit to your school on 16 June 2017, 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 November 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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils feel safe, and are safe, on their bus journeys to and from school
- provide consistently high-quality teaching in science to ensure that pupils who have fallen behind are able to catch up
- raise teachers' expectations of pupils' presentation of their work.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the executive principal, members of the local governing body and trustees from the Brooke Weston Trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's improvement plan and considered a range of other documentation, including evaluations of the school's effectiveness, information about the quality of teaching and the school's arrangements for performance management, and records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance. I visited 14 lessons as well as the isolation room. I held discussions with groups of pupils from Years 8, 9, 10 and 12.

Context

Since the previous inspection, seven members of staff have left the school, including two of the vice-principals. New subject leaders have been appointed in business studies and modern foreign languages. The school does not currently have a full team of permanent science teachers. Permanent staff have been appointed to science with effect from September 2017. At the time of this monitoring inspection, you had been in your post as associate principal for less than two weeks.

Main findings

The trust and the local governing body responded quickly to the findings of the previous inspection. They immediately deployed to the school the executive principal from the trust to strengthen the effectiveness of the senior leadership team. Under his skilful leadership, this team is becoming increasingly effective, with the result that the weaknesses identified by inspectors at the last inspection are being tackled successfully.

Senior staff from the trust, together with the school's governors, acknowledge that they had not previously monitored the school closely enough to identify the decline in its effectiveness. They also recognise that they did not test the information they were given by senior staff sufficiently well to ensure that it was accurate. Their recognition of past failings is matched by their determination to put things right, and they are doing so. Governors have increased the frequency of meetings of the governing body to ensure that the school quickly gets back on track. As a result of this, and the improved quality of information they now receive, governors have a much more accurate and precise view of the school's strengths and weaknesses than before.

Senior leaders' evaluations of the school's effectiveness are accurate and reflect the work that needs to be done in order for the school to be good by the time of its next section 5 inspection. The improvement plan, driven by the executive principal, sets out clearly the actions that are needed, and pulls no punches in identifying where the changes that have been introduced have not made enough difference. These documents are also available on the school's website so that parents can see the progress that is being made.

The executive principal has devised a range of strategies to strengthen in the longer term the quality of leadership, the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour throughout the school. These have been accompanied by immediate actions to bring about rapid improvements in the areas most in need of attention. Raised expectations of pupils' conduct and behaviour, for example, have resulted in clear improvements to these aspects of the school. Most, though not all, of the pupils I spoke with said that behaviour has improved since the inspection. All agreed that the improved facilities in the central area had markedly improved behaviour during social times. Pupils reported, however, that behaviour is routinely poor on some of the school buses. This, they said, makes them feel unsafe as they travel to and from school.

Strategies to improve the quality of teaching are proving effective. Staff who need help to improve their teaching receive coaching from the school's most effective teachers. Senior leaders maintain careful oversight of this to ensure that it is making a difference. With the agreement of staff, the executive principal has also amended teachers' performance management targets during the current appraisal cycle to ensure that they focus sufficiently on raising pupils' achievement. The large majority of pupils I spoke with said that teaching has improved, including in subjects which previously were weaker, such as modern foreign languages. They explained how teachers are making the purpose of each lesson clearer to them than previously, and how lessons now begin with a recap of previous learning.

In almost all of the lessons I visited, the pupils behaved well and learned effectively. In these lessons, they listened attentively to their teachers and each other. They collaborated with their classmates purposefully and without fuss when asked to do so. Not all teachers, however, insist that pupils present their work well, particularly the boys. Teaching has improved, but it is still not consistent enough, a point recognised by pupils. Older pupils, in particular, are frustrated at the variable and weaker teaching they currently receive in science because of difficulties in staffing. The trust has ensured that the school will be fully staffed in science from September.

Senior staff and teachers are making increasingly effective use of assessment data to identify any pupils who are falling behind, so that they can be supported. Improvements to the management of this information are also enabling staff to focus their efforts more effectively on raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The director of education from the trust is working closely with school leaders to ensure that strategies to raise the achievement, attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils are sufficiently effective.

Although you have only very recently joined the school, all of the pupils I spoke with said you have made a good impression. They are particularly encouraged by your willingness to listen to their views as you work to improve behaviour, the quality of teaching and their enjoyment of learning.

External support

The chief executive officer of the trust recognises that the trust did not do enough to prevent the decline in the school's overall effectiveness. The trust has since taken concerted action to ensure that the school improves quickly. The determination of trustees that the school quickly becomes good is reflected in their undertaking that the executive principal will continue to support the school's improvement 'until the job is done'.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton

Her Majesty's Inspector