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Mr Stephen Dixon
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Dear Mr Dixon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Barnsley Academy

Following my visit to your school on 18 September 2018, 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 and 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 taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions
- improve the attendance of all pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the executive principal, the regional director of United Learning Trust (ULT), other senior leaders, middle leaders and a group of Year 11 pupils to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation was held with the chair of the governing body, who is also a representative of ULT. The school improvement plan and other documents provided by the school, including governing body minutes and records of the support and challenge from ULT, were evaluated. I undertook brief visits to a

range of lessons with you and one of the vice-principals. I looked at pupils' work during my visits to lessons.

Context

The leadership team has been restructured and the number of senior leaders reduced from eight to six. A new middle leader for mathematics started this term and the assistant special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has been promoted to SENCo. Nine new teachers started at the beginning of September 2018, including five newly qualified teachers. Two 'closing the gap' coordinators were appointed in the summer term 2018.

The school is now part of a cluster of four ULT schools in Yorkshire, led by a new executive principal.

Main findings

You have been highly effective in setting the vision for staff and pupils, who understand your drive for high expectations and strong achievement. As a result, staff and pupils are positive about the improvements you have led across the school. The school improvement plan tackles the areas for improvement with sensible actions. However, milestones in the plan list completion of actions, rather than numerical targets for improvement to assist leaders and governors to monitor and evaluate the impact of actions taken to address the areas for improvement.

Middle leadership has strengthened. As a result of training in school and support from ULT subject advisers, middle leaders have gained confidence in their roles. They carefully monitor and evaluate the progress of Year 11 pupils using the school's assessment cycle. Middle leaders hold teachers to account using the 'pre-audit' information completed by teachers about pupils' progress in their Year 11 classes. As a result, additional support is targeted more closely at pupils who are falling behind. Some departments are starting to use this system to monitor progress in Year 10. The new 'closing the gap' coordinators analyse progress information for key stage 3 and key stage 4 pupils and report concerns to heads of department, who can then intervene. This work is at an early stage. It is too soon to see the impact of the 'closing the gap' coordinators.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved. Unvalidated key stage 4 results for 2018 show attainment has improved for most groups of pupils and in the majority of subject areas. Training has helped teachers to be more aware of the prior attainment of their pupils and plan learning activities accordingly. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have been raised. As a result, work for the most able pupils is more challenging. You acknowledge that the quality of teaching and learning is not consistently strong. Colleagues whose practice needs to improve are supported through coaching and support plans. This bespoke support has contributed to the improvements in teaching and learning.

A review of spending of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils has been completed. Following this, one of the vice-principals took on leadership of this additional funding. The funding has been directed more strongly towards academic achievement across the school. Additional staffing in core subjects enables specific groups of disadvantaged pupils to receive extra help. Middle-ability disadvantaged pupils at key stage 3 are a target group this year. It is too soon to see the impact of this work. Extra lessons for Year 11 pupils after school carefully target pupils' learning needs. Teachers pay particular attention to the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils improved at key stage 4 in 2017. The unvalidated results for GCSE in 2018 demonstrate that the attainment of disadvantaged pupils has improved further and gaps with other pupils have decreased.

The learning environment is calm and positive. The school building is well presented and free from graffiti. Pupils' attitudes to learning have improved because of better teaching and raised expectations. In response to pupils' requests, you have changed the behaviour policy this term so that disruption in lessons is simply not tolerated. Pupils and staff speak very positively about the improvements in behaviour. No poor behaviour was observed in any of the lessons visited during the inspection. The vast majority of pupils were thoroughly immersed in their learning. You raised the bar for good behaviour last year and have raised it even higher this year. As a result, the number of fixed-term exclusions has increased. Leaders are acutely aware that exclusions must be reduced. A new provision for internal exclusion is in place. This is at an early stage, but I observed young people engaged calmly in their learning and working together in the provision.

The school takes great care of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and those who are vulnerable. The new SENCo has started to audit the impact of the spending on the support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. She has reflected thoughtfully on next steps. This work is at an early stage. Provision for vulnerable pupils allows them to work in a setting most suited to their needs during any particular lesson. Consequently, pupils whose behaviour is a barrier to learning are helped to avoid exclusion.

Although persistent absence reduced slightly last year, absence levels increased. The attendance of pupils so far this term is lower than that at the same time last year. Staff work hard with pupils and their families to improve individuals' attendance. The education welfare officer works in the community supporting families and bringing pupils to school. The school was particularly successful in raising the attendance of Year 11 pupils last year. Pupils who arrive in-year at Barnsley Academy from other schools are helped to increase their attendance because of the sensitive support provided to them. Leaders have reviewed the rewards for attendance so that improving attendance is recognised as well as good attendance. However, attendance is still too low. Evaluations of the reasons for low attendance tell the story of pupils' absence well but do not use absence data

sharply to explain the issues. This area for improvement does not have the high profile among staff afforded to other areas.

The chair of the governing body has an astute understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of both Barnsley Academy and the governing body. Governors have been trained to evaluate information presented by school leaders. Minutes of governing body meetings demonstrate that governors ask appropriate questions and challenge school leaders about the impact of their work to improve the school. A review of governance in ULT overall is under way. Given that, and the improvements in governance, it is unlikely that a review of the school's governance will be necessary.

External support

Officers from ULT provide effective support for senior and middle leaders. Half-termly meetings between you, the regional director and the chair of the governing body and regular school reviews are challenging and supportive. Targets and actions agreed at these meetings are followed up carefully. This process has contributed to the improvements in the school. Subject advisers have supported middle leaders with the development of the curriculum, improving the quality of teaching and learning and checking the accuracy of assessments. Middle leaders value the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues from schools in the Yorkshire cluster and across the wider trust.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane

Her Majesty's Inspector