

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms A Widdowson
Berwick Academy
Adams Drive
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Northumberland
TD15 2JF

Dear Ms Widdowson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Berwick Academy

Following my visit to your school on 10 October 2016, 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 January 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in January 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not 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:

- improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - swiftly addressing remaining weaknesses in the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that staff consistently follow expectations and policies on teaching, learning and assessment
 - aligning the ongoing monitoring of the quality of teaching more closely with pupils' progress and outcomes
 - creating clearer milestones in the school improvement plan of what will be achieved and by when.

- accelerate improvements in the quality of teaching so that pupils' rates of progress improve more rapidly across a wide range of subjects.
- rapidly improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils through closer monitoring, more focused teaching and interventions, and stronger links with parents.

Evidence

During the visit, I met you, senior and middle leaders and a range of staff to discuss the actions taken to improve the school since the last inspection. I undertook learning walks with you and the deputy headteacher during which I also looked at work in books and folders. I held telephone conversations with the chair of the governing body and the local authority school improvement partner. I met a group of pupils to discuss their learning and any changes they had identified since the last inspection. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including self-evaluation documents, assessment information on current progress and safeguarding documents.

Context

Since the last inspection, individual heads of year have been appointed to add further pastoral leadership capacity. An assistant headteacher has been appointed to oversee mathematics and the use of interventions.

Main findings

School leaders have introduced changes to the leadership structure and teaching and learning since the last inspection. These changes are bringing about improvements in some subjects and in aspects of behaviour and welfare. However, the overall impact is variable and pupils' progress remains too slow. Unvalidated school results for 2016 suggest that overall progress for pupils at key stage 4 will be below the government's floor standards, the minimum expectations for pupils' progress. In addition, progress made by disadvantaged pupils remains slow in many areas. While the 2016 outcomes are affected by a legacy caused by an inappropriate curriculum, they still reflect widespread underperformance which show that leaders have not addressed areas for improvement with sufficient urgency.

Middle leaders are becoming more involved in procedures to check the quality of teaching in their departments. This increased involvement of middle leaders is contributing to improving teaching and progress in subjects such as science. However, in too many subjects considerable inconsistency remains. Teachers do not consistently follow the school's marking policy and rates of progress in books over time vary from teacher to teacher within departments. Quality assurance measures are not having sufficient impact and too many middle leaders are not ensuring that new expectations are met. While leaders' attempts to build longer-term

improvement are laudable, they need to be swifter in addressing basic expectations of teaching and assessment so that progress can be accelerated for current pupils.

Leaders have introduced new training to develop aspects of teaching and learning. They have shared new guidelines on effective teaching and new strategies to measure the quality of assessment. There was evidence of this contributing to improving progress in science and stronger teaching in some mathematics lessons. Pupils described how lessons had become more focused and that in some subjects feedback was helping them to make better progress. They also stated that they had a better awareness of their targets and aspirations. There was evidence of this in some history books and in science books. However, variability remains and in too many subjects challenge remains low, with teachers labouring on superficial aspects of learning without using deeper questioning and prompts to deepen understanding. Actions to check the quality of teaching need to be strengthened. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work are too focused on surface compliance and are not linked explicitly to pupils' progress.

Leaders' actions to improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils are beginning to show impact. Newly appointed year leaders are adding further capacity in this area. More focused pastoral leadership is contributing to closer tracking and support that are improving attendance and reducing levels of persistent absence. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved. Pupils describe how new systems for addressing poor behaviour are leading to better behaviour in lessons, and how rewards are providing incentives to behave better. However, overall days lost to fixed-term exclusion rose in 2016 and disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remain much more likely to be excluded than their peers. A newly appointed assistant headteacher is revising the personal, social and health education programme in consultation with local authority specialists. New behavioural expectations are displayed in planners and posters, and they are also highlighted in school reports. There are signs of an emerging impact that leaders will need to support so that it is sustained. Low-level disruption remains most apparent where teaching fails to engage and challenge.

Leaders have worked with external partners to develop the quality of teaching and the curriculum. Partnerships with local middle schools are improving the transition between schools and building greater curriculum continuity. While this is supporting pupils making better progress in some subjects, some teachers have limited understanding of pupils' prior knowledge and fail to build on it.

A recent review of the pupil premium is being used to inform tracking, teaching and the use of interventions. Although attendance for disadvantaged pupils has improved, their progress remains considerably weaker than that of other pupils nationally.

Governors are becoming stronger in holding leaders and teachers to account for the performance of pupils, with a more robust use of performance management systems. Processes to engender a more positive learning culture are being promoted. However, the overall pace of improvement has been too slow as these changes are not resulting in the rapid improvements necessary to increase the rate of pupils' progress.

External support

The school has worked with an outstanding school to develop strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The school commissions support from the local authority to help it in evaluating the quality of provision and in exploring further improvement strategies. Partnerships with a local middle school have informed curriculum changes and strengthened wider aspects of academic and pastoral transition. The school recently commissioned a review of its use of the pupil premium that is being used to inform tracking, teaching and the use of interventions. However, there is little evidence that these strategies are having a positive impact on pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector