

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



12 October 2018

Mr M Shipman
Headteacher
Sheffield Springs Academy
Hurlfield Road
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S12 2SF

Dear Mr Shipman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sheffield Springs Academy

Following my visit to your school on 3 October 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, governors and the trust 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:

- develop middle leadership skills through the multi-academy trust cluster model to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are further improved
- develop positive relationships between the school, pupils and community to further reduce exclusions.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior and middle leaders. I also met with the executive principal and had a telephone conversation with the regional director (north) of the United Learning Trust. In addition, I met with representatives of the school's board of governors. School documentation, including the school self-evaluation document, improvement plans and other relevant documents, were scrutinised. I conducted short visits to a few lessons with the senior leader with responsibility for leading on teaching, learning and assessment and observed the behaviour of pupils at social times around the school. A sample of pupils' work was reviewed alongside senior and middle leaders. I also met with a group of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 to evaluate their views on developments since the last inspection.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in the senior and middle leadership of the school. You were permanently appointed as headteacher of the school in May 2018 after a period as associate headteacher. The senior leadership team of the school has been restructured and several key middle leaders have also been recently appointed. The governing body has undergone significant restructure, including the appointment of a new chair of the governing body.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, together with the multi-academy trust, you have reviewed the effectiveness of leadership and management. You have acted swiftly to establish a team of leaders who are having a much greater impact when tackling the areas which require improvement. You have not been afraid to challenge and tackle any weakness in teaching which has been identified. There is now greater stability in your teaching staff; for example, the number of temporary staff has reduced considerably. You are supporting and developing your middle leaders, who have an important role to play in tackling the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection.

Leaders have produced detailed plans to tackle weakness which are focused and are being evaluated accurately against clear success criteria. The quality of teaching and learning is improving because of these actions and, as a result, the progress of pupils is also improving. You have established a systematic approach to evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. This links closely to the professional development staff benefit from, allowing them to make improvements. Leaders are honest in their view, however, that inconsistencies remain and there remains further work to be done.

You told me you believe there has been a fundamental change in the attitudes of both staff and pupils since the last inspection. From the evidence which I was able

to collect during my visit, I agree with your view. Pupils in classrooms were cooperative and, in the main, purposeful in their learning. At all times, I observed pupils to be polite and respectful to each other, staff and visitors. The relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Staff know your pupils well and pupils are respectful towards staff.

During visits to lessons, I was able to confirm that, in many cases, expectations have been raised. Teachers are planning activities which consider what pupils already know. They are now checking the understanding of pupils regularly to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge or to identify any misconceptions they may have. Teachers are then using this information to provide individualised support for pupils where it is needed. The evidence I saw in the pupils' books also confirmed that teachers are not afraid to revisit topics which pupils have found difficult to grasp. It was particularly pleasing to observe how mathematics teachers are using worded questions to confirm understanding and to provide pupils with the opportunity to tackle problems which are in unfamiliar contexts. Older pupils who are most-able, are given challenging work to tackle. However, more work needs to be done with those younger pupils who are most-able, as they are not always as stretched or challenged as their older peers. The pupils who I spoke to during my visit were enthusiastic when telling me teaching has improved since the last inspection. They told me they feel teachers are now focusing on the learning and the support pupils need to understand their work. The pupils report that this is a significant change since the last inspection. You and school leaders are realistic in your evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and you told me that further work will be required to ensure that there is greater consistency across all subjects. I agree with you, but also recognise the significant improvements you have made since the last inspection. These improvements in teaching and learning have had a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. Year 11 results have improved over the past two years.

Leaders were quick to identify the value of guiding pupils towards more challenging books to read, both for pleasure and for study. A full audit of books used in English lessons has been carried out to identify engaging and challenging texts for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. For example, I observed Year 9 pupils studying the context of George Orwell's 'Animal farm'. They were able to explain to me the characteristics of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin and how the relationship between them had developed leading up to Lenin's death. This deliberate strategy is effective in preparing pupils for more challenging texts for GCSE study and the skills they will need to understand them fully. Alongside this, the school has adopted several reading schemes which identify challenging books to read for pleasure. Pupils report that they enjoy this focus on reading, although, at times, it can be difficult to balance the requirement to read with their homework demands.

Since the last inspection, you have acted quickly to change the culture of behaviour in the school. Alternative provision for the more challenging pupils is now on the school site and shared with a partner school from within the trust. You have

redesigned the pastoral support for pupils and appointed a new leader to take responsibility for behaviour and attendance. In addition, you have very recently implemented a new behaviour policy. This has clarity and rigour, within a framework which builds upon positive relationships with all pupils and their families. Leaders and staff across the school report that behaviour has improved significantly since the last inspection and now there is 'more emphasis on learning and the new approach allows pupils to succeed'.

Pupils conduct themselves around the school well. They wear their uniform proudly and generally smartly. I observed their behaviour during breaktime and saw them being polite and courteous towards each other. Pupils in 'The Bridge' enjoy a safe and welcoming environment which allows them to talk with staff and develop their social skills. The pupils who I met with report that behaviour has improved hugely since the last inspection. They believe the new behaviour policy allows for 'fair and civil conversations' between staff and pupils. They value this new approach and believe there is now a much better learning environment. The pupils value the improvements in the wider opportunities available for them to experience outside of the classroom too. They enthused about the opportunity to assume positions of responsibility, such as anti-bullying ambassadors, and they appreciate the rewards and recognition of success they receive from teachers, staff and school leaders.

Your actions, in addressing improvements in behaviour, have had a positive impact. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced significantly since the introduction of the new behaviour policy in May 2018. Permanent exclusions are reducing but are still high. You agree that building relationships with pupils, families and the community will be important in reducing exclusions further in the future.

School leaders, the regional director of the trust and pupils are all passionate in their view that recent changes in the learning and behaviour culture of the school are beginning to change the perceptions of the local community. Governors report that they have first-hand experience of these changing perceptions: they hear from the community that 'Springs is now a viable option for my child. That was not the case before.'

External support

The school is part of the United Learning multi-academy trust and works in partnership with three other trust schools in the regional 'cluster'. Through this arrangement, the trust provides an executive principal, subject advisers and a range of professional development opportunities for staff. Across the cluster, the school plays an integral part in developing common approaches and policies such as those which focus on further developing teaching, learning and assessment. This continued support and challenge from the trust has ensured that school leaders' actions have remained focused on the priority areas in need of improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Barry Found
Her Majesty's Inspector