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Mr Paul Dearden
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Dear Mr Dearden

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Hope Valley College

Following my visit with John Edwards, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 28 November 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in December 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the assistant principals, one of whom is the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), and the coordinator of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Inspectors met with a group of subject leaders and a group of teachers. Further meetings were held with two members of the governing body, including the chair and the co-vice-chair. Inspectors spoke formally with a group of pupils from Year 9 and Year 10 to discuss their experiences in school, as well as reviewing their work books. Inspectors observed pupils' learning in lessons across different year groups and subjects, and spoke informally with pupils about their learning. Some of these learning observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.

Inspectors scrutinised documents, including senior leaders' evaluations of the

school's work, the school's information about current pupils' progress and pupils' attendance and exclusions records. Inspectors examined external reviews relating to governance, the pupil premium funding and the provision for pupils with SEND. They also examined a range of different policies on the school's website and recent minutes of governing body meetings. The lead inspector reviewed the school's single central record and the system for recruiting staff, including some staff personnel files. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

The leadership of the school has undergone changes since the previous inspection. The principal at the time of the inspection has not been in school since February 2018. At that point, you took up your current position as acting principal, having previously been the deputy principal. The principal officially left the school in June 2018. Since taking up your temporary role, no further appointments have been made, and you have reorganised the senior leadership team so that there are clear lines of responsibility and accountability. In September 2018, a new coordinator of the provision for pupils with SEND (SENCo) was appointed to carry out the role, with support from the previous incumbent.

Following a review of governance in March 2018, the governing body has been reduced in size from 17 to 11 members. A new governor with responsibility for safeguarding has been appointed recently. Formal discussions regarding the possibilities of the school joining a multi-academy trust are ongoing between the governing body, a potential sponsor and the Department for Education. As yet, no official date has been set for when this may take place.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

At the time of the last inspection in December 2017, relationships within the senior team had broken down. There was also no longer an effective working dialogue between senior leaders and the governing body. Since February 2018, you and other senior leaders have worked together closely to re-establish positive lines of communication with governors and staff and to rebuild the trust that had previously been undermined. Staff are now clear about senior leaders' responsibilities, and they receive support and guidance through their respective line managers.

Since resolving these issues, leaders have now devised plans focused specifically on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. However, some of the plans lack precise details about leaders' actions and explicit criteria against which their success can be evaluated. The leadership turmoil and the uncertainty over the school's future governance arrangements have meant that leaders have been too slow to implement some of the improvement plans. So far, the impact of many of the plans is, at best, tentative in bringing about sustained improvements within the school. There is no certainty that leaders' actions will resolve all the areas for

improvement in a reasonable time-period.

Leaders have undertaken training to improve the quality of teachers' appraisals. They have reviewed the system to evaluate each teacher's performance. Leaders now hold teachers to account by analysing the effectiveness of their practice against the teachers' standards. However, it is too early to establish whether the new appraisal system is having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.

Leaders have reviewed the school's curriculum and have made some changes. They have ensured that all current Year 10 pupils meet the criteria for the government's accountability measure, Progress 8. Some pupils in key stage 4 have opted to study triple science, providing the most able pupils with a greater level of challenge. However, too few key stage 4 pupils study languages or humanities, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Meanwhile, at key stage 3, Year 7 pupils now follow one modern foreign language course rather than three, allowing them to attain a greater depth of understanding. Leaders have also allocated more curriculum time to the teaching of humanities. These key stage 3 curriculum changes offer teachers of these subjects more opportunities to challenge pupils in their work and may, in time, encourage more pupils to opt to study these subjects at GCSE.

Senior leaders have worked alongside faculty leaders to carry out reviews in their areas of responsibility. A more rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluation has helped leaders to establish each subject area's strengths and weaknesses. However, to date, there is limited evidence to indicate that these reviews have helped to reduce variations in the quality of teaching within and between subjects.

Too often, teachers do not routinely use information about pupils' starting points to plan work that meets pupils' needs closely. Some teachers do not have consistently high expectations of what all pupils, particularly the most able pupils, can achieve. In some lessons, pupils are not encouraged to extend their learning with more detailed responses, either orally or in their written work. There are pockets of good practice, for example in English, where strong teaching promotes pupils' high levels of understanding and their good progress over time. However, while pupils do feel challenged in some subjects, this is not consistent across them all. Teachers who spoke with inspectors could not readily identify how their practice has changed since the previous inspection in order to ensure that the needs of all pupils are being met.

Leaders have developed more coherent systems to assess pupils' short- and long-term progress, using the new GCSE grades with all year groups. Most pupils understand the systems and know their personal target grades. However, according to leaders, some teachers are not yet accurate in applying the new GCSE grades to pupils' work, leading to inconsistencies in their assessments. As a consequence, the system does not allow leaders to have an accurate view of pupils' current progress. Leaders have also implemented a new assessment and marking policy in order to

improve the quality of feedback provided by teachers to pupils so that pupils can improve their work and make good progress. Teachers now have more meaningful dialogue with pupils, allowing pupils to take more responsibility for improving their work. However, teachers are not yet applying the strategy consistently across all subjects, and not all pupils are responding effectively to the feedback they receive. Leaders ensure that parents have access to information about their children's progress, both through their children's workbooks and through the school's online systems.

In 2018, pupils' progress in key stage 4 improved and was above the national average, including for the most able pupils, according to provisional information. These pupils made good progress across the full range of subjects compared with pupils nationally. However, pupils' outcomes did not improve for all groups of pupils. While pupils with an education, health and care plan made good progress, pupils with SEND who had a support plan made poor progress compared with pupils from similar starting points. Similarly, disadvantaged pupils' progress was well below the national average. Current pupils' information suggests that pupils are making good progress in most year groups. However, while current disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 are making good progress, the progress of those in Year 10 is much weaker. As a result, leaders are not meeting some current pupils' needs sufficiently well.

Leaders commissioned a review of the school's provision for pupils with SEND. A new SENCo took over the responsibility for these pupils in September 2018. He has provided some effective support for individual pupils with SEND that has helped them make better progress than previously. Teachers now receive appropriate information and updates about pupils with SEND. However, they are not all using this guidance effectively as part of their planning, to ensure that the needs of these pupils are being well-met. While governors have clearly budgeted plans in place to improve the provision for pupils with SEND, they do not yet hold leaders to account rigorously for the additional funding received to improve these pupils' outcomes.

At the last inspection, leaders were recommended to carry out a review of the pupil premium funding received by the school to support disadvantaged pupils. Unfortunately, this review was not carried out until July 2018, resulting in many disadvantaged pupils not continuing to make the progress of which they are capable. The review has now helped leaders to develop more precise plans to support these pupils.

Leaders have raised the profile of disadvantaged pupils. Some faculties have implemented specific strategies to support these pupils, particularly in English and mathematics. However, leaders have not ensured that these pupils receive consistent support across all subject areas. Leaders have changed their emphasis to ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive support earlier before they have the potential to fall behind their school peers. Leaders have only recently established clear lines of accountability to governors for the additional funds received for these pupils. It is too early to assess the impact of leaders' plans for using the pupil

premium funding. Some are yet to be implemented and others have not had time to have a sustained impact on disadvantaged pupils' outcomes.

Leaders' strategies to reduce low-level disruption in lessons are having a positive impact, thanks to the new 'Good Behaviour Policy'. Leaders are monitoring the effectiveness of the strategies to ensure that incidents of low-level disruption are limited. In learning observed by inspectors, a majority of pupils engaged well and benefited from positive relationships between pupils, their peers and adults. When inspectors observed pupils engaging in low-level disruption rather than focusing on their learning, this was because of poor-quality teaching or work that did not meet the pupils' needs rather than pupils' poor behaviour.

Pupils' absence from school has increased since the previous inspection. The absence of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND is too high, in comparison with other pupils nationally. Similarly, the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has markedly increased, including for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Leaders are not confident that pupils' absence was recorded accurately previously, meaning that it may have been lower for longer than official information indicates. Since September 2018, leaders have tightened up attendance procedures for pupils. However, to date, these new systems have not been successful in improving pupils' attendance or reducing their persistent absence.

Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and are effective. Pupils say that they feel safe, happy and secure in the school. They say that any issues with bullying are resolved swiftly by staff. The DSL and other safeguarding leaders have received recent training for their roles. They update staff regularly, including about their responsibilities in relation to the 'Prevent' duty and female genital mutilation. Leaders know the pupils who are most vulnerable well and ensure that external support is sought for them when required. Pupils' safeguarding records are detailed and updated in a timely manner. Leaders follow secure procedures when recruiting new staff and maintain detailed records of the checks they carry out. Governors' oversight of safeguarding is improving. Some governors have completed safer recruitment and safeguarding training. A governor has recently taken on the responsibility for overseeing safeguarding. However, they are yet to meet with the DSL to review the school's safeguarding practices and procedures.

Governors recognise that they were culpable for the position that the school found itself in at the previous inspection, particularly with regard to the complete breakdown in relationships between senior leaders. The governance review that took place in March 2018 provided governors with an astute set of recommendations, many of which they have responded to swiftly. Governors now have much greater clarity as to their strategic role in supporting school leaders and holding them to account for their work. The governing body has been rationalised to allow it to be more responsive to leaders' needs, while still ensuring that the remaining governors possess the necessary skills to carry out their roles effectively. Governors are increasingly involved in the day-to-day life of the school, helping

them to develop an understanding of the issues faced by leaders. New governor links with different areas of the school have been established to keep governors more informed, while helping to rebuild trust.

Many of the governors' responses to the review are still in their early stages and only just beginning to have an impact on supporting and challenging leaders in their work. Governors have not yet held leaders to account for the impact of additional funding on pupils' outcomes, including the pupil premium funding, additional funding for pupils with SEND and the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding. Similarly, governors do not yet have a rigorous understanding of information about pupils' outcomes. They are not yet skilled enough to be able to hold leaders to account effectively, for example for disadvantaged pupils' progress.

Senior leaders have not sought external support to help them bring about the required improvements. More recently, however, they have secured the services of an experienced school improvement consultant, who is due to start working with leaders soon.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff

Her Majesty's Inspector