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Dear Mrs Sanchez

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Martin High School Anstey

Following my visit to your school on 27 June 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2014. 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior and middle leaders, three members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I made short visits to lessons, accompanied by a senior leader, and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. I considered a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and action plans, current performance information, monitoring records, records of an external adviser and minutes of the governing body. I checked the single central

record and the school's safeguarding policy. I spoke formally with a group of Year 10 pupils.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been wholesale changes to the leadership of the school. The previous headteacher and senior leadership team have left the school. You were appointed in September 2015, with a new leadership team. There have been significant changes to staffing, including at middle leadership level. You have made several new appointments for the autumn term. There are two new appointments to the governing body.

Main findings

Since your appointment in September 2015 you have set a new direction for the school. You have worked with senior leaders to draw up detailed, thorough action plans that address specifically the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The plans set out very clearly who is responsible for making sure that these actions happen, and how their impact will be monitored. This has ensured that governors are now able to monitor with greater accuracy the school's progress towards being judged as a good school.

You have introduced a new assessment system, and ensure that pupils' progress is measured more regularly throughout the school year. You recognise that previous leaders' predictions for the school's first set of GCSE results were not accurate. You have therefore taken action to ensure that current predictions are accurate, for example, by inviting moderators from examination boards into school and increasing opportunities for staff to work with each other and with colleagues from partner schools to improve the accuracy of their assessments. Your new leadership structure ensures that leaders at all levels are aware of the performance of different groups. The effective communication that is now evident in the school means that middle leaders and teachers can take action much more swiftly to address any identified underperformance. This is a significant improvement.

Increasingly effective middle leaders are now playing a more prominent role in school improvement. They are now held to account much more rigorously by senior leaders, and understand their role in holding teachers in their areas to account for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The monitoring and evaluation plans that are now in place for each curriculum area make clear the specific actions that are needed to improve each department. This increased rigour is helping these leaders to have a more accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of their areas. Through regular work scrutiny and learning walks, leaders recognise that some inconsistencies remain, for example in the quality of marking and feedback. They know that challenging and addressing this is their responsibility. The evidence

from scrutinising pupils' books is that these leaders are more effective in communicating and enforcing expectations at departmental level.

The quality of teaching continues to improve as a result of a more rigorous programme of quality assurance. This now takes a wider range of evidence into account when judging the quality of teaching, including the progress made by different groups of pupils, the quality of work in their books and the quality of marking and feedback. During your regular learning walks and lesson observations, you and other leaders check that your higher expectations are in place. Information from these observations allows you to identify the further improvements that are needed, so that the support put in place for teachers focuses much more closely on their individual needs. You have ensured that teachers' performance management is linked to whole-school priorities. This ensures that teachers know the role they play in raising standards in the school.

Teachers are benefiting from opportunities to learn from the best practice in the school and elsewhere. The programme of professional development for teachers has for the first time included the use of external expertise. The new-found excitement about teaching and learning is evident in the teaching and learning group, where colleagues have volunteered to lead sessions in their areas of expertise. These and other initiatives have led to a culture of openness among staff. This openness typifies the new approach you have brought in. You have increased opportunities for staff to visit other schools and have developed effective partnerships with local schools. This has meant that staff have a much clearer understanding of what good and outstanding practice looks like.

You have identified that there are further improvements to be made to teaching. There is more to do to ensure that marking and feedback are consistently effective and that all teachers use questioning equally well to challenge and extend the learning of the most able pupils in particular.

Pupils who spoke with me described their school as a friendly community where everyone is accepted for who they are. They appreciate the positive and friendly relationships they enjoy with their teachers. They are confident that they all have someone to turn to if they have worries or concerns, and know that their teachers will listen to them.

They feel strongly that their new headteacher has improved things for the better and, in their words, that this school 'now feels like a good school'. They state that the stricter uniform policy has led to improved behaviour around school and that the vast majority of pupils are responding positively to the higher expectations. They told me that some pupils have struggled to adapt to the stricter behaviour policy. You agree that this accounts for the increase in fixed-term exclusions that was seen in the autumn term. Attendance is improving, and is now in line with the national average. You have taken effective action to improve the attendance of pupils who

are most frequently absent from school, including, where necessary, issuing fines to their parents.

The presentation of pupils' work is generally improving. Regular lesson monitoring rightly focuses on this aspect to ensure that all teachers have the same high expectations for the presentation of pupils' work.

Pupils who left the school in 2015 did not make sufficient progress across a range of subjects. Despite beginning the school with levels of prior attainment that were above the national average, their achievement as a whole was below that seen nationally. The proportion that gained five A* to C grades including English and mathematics was below average. The progress made by pupils in mathematics in particular was not good enough. Higher-ability pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability did not make sufficient progress.

However, there are now strong signs of improving outcomes for pupils. You are predicting the proportion that will gain five A* to C grades, including in English and mathematics, will be above that seen nationally in 2015 and an increased proportion of pupils will make expected and more than expected progress in English and mathematics. You recognise that more needs to be done to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, who you predict will not do as well as their peers. Lower down the school there is evidence that these pupils are doing better, because their needs are being identified and addressed more quickly. The more challenging targets being set for pupils are ensuring that all pupils get off to a better start at the school and expectations for all are higher.

Safeguarding is effective. You have used your expertise to improve this area of the school's work, ensuring that policies are up to date and that reporting protocols are clear to parents as well as staff. Staff and governors are aware of and take very seriously their duties under the 'Prevent' duty, and are alert to any possible signs of pupils who may be at risk. Leaders have a good understanding of the safeguarding risks that are most likely to affect pupils. The single central record meets requirements.

Governance

Since the previous monitoring inspection, you have carried out an external review of governance that identified some key strengths in governance, as well as areas for further development. In response to this, governors carried out a skills audit to identify any remaining gaps in their knowledge and skills. The new appointments made to the governing body have brought new skills and expertise to this aspect of leadership. Governors recognise that in the past, they were too accepting of the information provided by leaders and did not do enough to challenge the accuracy of this information. You have set clear expectations of the challenge you expect governors to bring to your leadership, and they have responded well to these

expectations. As a result, governors are now more effective in holding you and other leaders to account for the progress the school is making.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

You have wisely recognised the need to develop strategic partnerships with local good and outstanding schools to accelerate the progress the school is making. This has included high-quality training for teachers and leaders. You have also brokered support from specialist leaders of education to support the maths and science departments.

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

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan
Her Majesty's Inspector