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Mr S Lomax
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Dear Mr Lomax

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of The Nuneaton Academy

Following my visit to your school on 10 May 2017, 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 March 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, executive headteacher, chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, chair of the local governing body and national leader of education (NLE) who has been working with the school. The trust's statement of action and the school's action plans were evaluated. I also met the senior leadership team, middle leaders and groups of pupils. The developments in teaching and learning were evaluated through visits to lessons in a variety of subjects.

Context

At the time of the previous inspection, the senior leadership team had very recently taken up their leadership positions. Since the inspection, the associate headteacher has become the substantive headteacher. A new executive headteacher has been appointed by the trust. Two employees from the Midland Academies Trust school improvement team support the school on school improvement and mathematics.

The school has now closed its sixth form.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

In 2016, attainment and progress for Year 11 was very weak across all groups of pupils and in most subjects. This reflected the relatively limited time that the new leadership had to accelerate the progress of these pupils. Leaders initially focused closely on the accuracy of teachers' assessments so that in the short amount of time available teachers could design interventions to help pupils begin to catch up.

Leaders made the decision to focus on progress in core subjects in the short term so that pupils in Year 11 could secure places in further education, employment and training. Although the percentage of pupils who gained both English and mathematics GCSEs in 2016 was well below the national average, much progress was made over the year from a very low starting point.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have continued to pay close attention to the accuracy of teachers' assessment. All staff understand the purposes and processes of assessment in the school. They have established a common assessment process at key points. Teachers now make initial assessments, do group standardisation and moderation, and then submit final assessments. Standardisation is undertaken internally and externally and the school's records show that there is now a high level of agreement with external moderation partners. This accurate assessment of pupils' current attainment and progress means that leaders can direct appropriate intervention and support towards pupils when they fall behind or their progress slows.

The school's assessment information shows that the percentage of pupils currently in Year 11 now making appropriate progress from their starting points has improved rapidly since last year. Boys' and disadvantaged pupils' progress has improved considerably. Despite these improvements since the new leadership team took over the school, leaders acknowledge that Year 11 progress across all groups of pupils is still likely to be lower than that for other pupils nationally with similar starting points. This is because of a legacy of poor teaching over a number of years.

Current pupils in other year groups are making stronger progress from their key stage 2 starting points. Observations of learning during the inspection and the school's own records show that teaching has improved quickly since the last inspection. Leaders have identified those teachers who need extra support and have ensured that the expectations of teaching, planning and assessment are clear and consistent. Governors and leaders have used the appraisal system judiciously to reward teachers who have a strong impact on pupils' progress. The school has now trained a group of teacher effectiveness coaches and they are improving teaching further.

As a result, the low-level disruption that was, in the past, associated with weaker teaching has now decreased substantially. Observations during the inspection and the school's records demonstrate these improvements. Pupils and staff agree that low-level disruption is now rare.

At the last inspection, the school did not have a fully staffed science department. Leaders have ensured that until recently the teaching team in science has been much more stable, and as a result pupils' progress in science has become stronger. However, recently, a number of science teachers have left. Although leaders have acted swiftly to fill these positions, this loss of staff is having a negative impact on some pupils' progress because the instability of the past is being repeated. These new teachers now have to build relationships with pupils and get to know their classes.

Some other vacant positions across the school have been filled with non-specialists or unqualified teachers. Leaders acknowledge that they need to provide these colleagues with extra support to make sure that pupils' progress is secure, and have arranged for some to undertake subject enhancement retraining. Others are in the process of gaining qualified teacher status by the assessment only route.

Governance has been strengthened since the last inspection. Governors reflected on their ability to hold the school to account and now undertake more visits to the school. They undertake learning walks with senior staff and as a matter of course meet pupils' panels before governors' meetings so that they can be confident of the way the school is developing. Documents scrutinised during the inspection showed that governors feed pupils' views into leadership meetings and that leaders take action based on what governors find.

Governors have established a separate 'raising achievement group': a group of governors who have specific skills in school improvement. This group includes three governors with particular expertise in school data. It meets school leaders separately and makes sure that the whole governing body and the trust board are fully aware of trends in pupils' progress. Governors have also rationalised the support that the school receives so that the roles of external partners are clear, and there are not too many partners involved.

The trust commissioned an NLE from Kenilworth National Support School for two days a week to act as executive headteacher. His task has been to give support to the new headteacher as he develops in his new role. This support has been valuable and because the strength of the leadership team has swiftly developed, the NLE now supports the wider leadership team and middle leaders for one day a week. The NLE has also brokered effective support from Kenilworth School. For example, Year 11 pupils from The Nuneaton Academy have taken masterclasses at Kenilworth School to help them catch up on work in mathematics, and staff from Kenilworth have worked with Nuneaton Academy staff across a range of subjects to check that their assessment is accurate. This arrangement is coming to an end soon because, rightly, the trust and governors judge the leadership team to be able to work more independently. In order to maintain strong strategic oversight, the trust has appointed an executive principal with strong record of school improvement across its schools.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action 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 trust board, the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Warwickshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dan Owen
Her Majesty's Inspector