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Phil Davies
Prospect School
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Dear Mr Davies

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Prospect School

Following my visit to your school on 10 July 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 and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- urgently address the decline in attendance, and continue to reduce exclusions, particularly for disadvantaged pupils
- ensure improvement plans contain specific measurable targets, and governors are provided with clearer analyses of progress information, so that leaders at all levels can be held accountable for improvements in their subject areas
- increase teachers' expectations so that the most able pupils are challenged to reach the highest standards across the curriculum
- ensure that teachers make better use of information on pupils' progress when they plan work, so that lessons are suitably challenging to enable pupils to progress well and catch up any lost ground, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with yourself, other senior leaders and representatives of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans. Short visits were made to a small number of lessons, jointly with senior leaders. I met with a group of pupils from Years 8 and 10 and reviewed a sample of books from pupils in key stages 3 and 4.

Context

There have been several changes since the last inspection. Recruitment and retention of staff have provided a challenge for leaders. Last year, there were a number of staffing changes while leaders sought to appoint subject specialists in subjects across the curriculum. However, the school is now fully staffed for next term. You have restructured your senior leadership team, reorganising roles and responsibilities. In addition, there have been several changes at subject leadership level, with the heads of English, mathematics and science all being recently appointed to their roles. The governors have worked with the local authority to review safeguarding, and with external consultants to seek to improve attendance.

Main findings

Year 11 GCSE outcomes in 2017 show that pupils made good progress in mathematics. However, they did not make strong progress from their starting points in some key subjects, including English, science, and the humanities. Disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils underperformed in these subjects, and across the curriculum. Leaders rightly prioritised addressing these areas in their action plans this year. There have been some improvements, notably in English. However, the pace of change has not been sufficiently rapid. Current assessment information shows that the most able pupils are not making enough progress in years 10 and 11, and that there are still large gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others, across the curriculum.

Senior leaders have implemented a revised programme of checks on the quality of teaching and now keep central records, allowing more regular reviews. Middle leaders are supported to engage in a series of visits to lessons and to review pupils' work. However, leaders' analysis of progress over time is not yet sufficiently accurate. It does not provide governors with a suitably in-depth understanding of the impact of the training and different initiatives on pupils' outcomes.

The recently introduced key stage 3 assessment and tracking systems are not embedded. Currently, teachers are not consistently using progress information to inform their planning. This means that teaching is not taking sufficient account of pupils' starting points. Pupils' books show that teachers' expectations are too

variable within and between different subjects, for example in science and English. In English, for example, teachers consistently follow the department's assessment policy. However, in science teachers' assessment practice is variable and the tasks set are not consistently challenging. Consequently, the pace and quality of work over time, particularly for the most able, are not sufficiently stretching. Across the curriculum, teachers' expectations of the quality of work expected from pupils over time are not consistently high, and some pupils have missed work and are not supported to catch up.

Leaders have rightly prioritised improving pupils' reading skills. Teachers in English have introduced a programme of reading support into the Year 7 curriculum, as well as developing a system of rewards and competitions. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the use of the school library and a notable increase in Year 7 pupils' reading skills this year.

New leaders of English, mathematics and science have been appointed since the last inspection. These leaders share a clear vision of what needs to be done to refine and improve teaching in their departments. However, many of their approaches are very new or are ideas that have not yet been implemented. While there have been improvements in English, it is too soon yet to see the impact of these systems in other subjects. Pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are still too variable, particularly in science.

You have restructured your team who help those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. You have ensured that support staff are now better informed, with bespoke information about the needs of these pupils. Provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language is well organised and tailored to meet these pupils' individual needs. Consequently, this group make very strong progress from their starting points. However, in-house progress information shows that disadvantaged pupils, and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, do not make good progress in key stages 3 and 4. Visits to classrooms identified that teachers are aware of who the disadvantaged pupils and those with SEN and/or disabilities are in their groups. However, pupils' books show that these groups do not make progress at the same rate as their peers. Leaders are aware that some teachers do not plan learning activities that sufficiently address the needs of these pupils.

Attendance has declined over the last three years. In 2017, overall attendance was below the national average and that of disadvantaged pupils was particularly poor. It was in the bottom 10% of all secondary schools. In response, this year, leaders have implemented new initiatives and recruited an in-house welfare officer and attendance officer. Leaders have also commissioned external consultants to audit and support improvements. Although in its early stages, there are signs that this work has begun to reduce the very high proportions of pupils who are persistently absent. However, it has not improved overall attendance, or that of disadvantaged pupils, both of which have declined again since September. Leaders' tracking of progress identifies that those pupils with high levels of absence are making

significantly less progress than their peers.

Recruitment and retention challenges last year meant that inconsistent staffing had a negative impact upon pupils' behaviour. Exclusion figures rose sharply in 2017. Comprehensive induction packages for new staff, together with an updated behaviour policy, have significantly reduced exclusions this academic year, although they are still higher than national averages. Leaders have clear plans in place to continue to improve behaviour and to implement extra provision from next year for pupils at risk of exclusion. During the inspection, some Year 8 and Year 10 pupils expressed concerns about behaviour. They reported that, while they trust staff to resolve serious incidents of bullying, they are concerned that incidents of racism and homophobia are not always consistently or effectively challenged by staff.

Governors are well informed about the context of the school and its key areas of strength and weakness. They have a clear and determined drive to support leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and understand their role in challenging improvements. Leaders ensure that governors are informed through a wealth of information from regular assessment points throughout the year. However, leaders do not give governors a sufficiently clear analysis of the complex progress information that is presented to them. In addition, this year, there has been less external moderation of teachers' and leaders' work. Together, these issues have prevented governors from being sufficiently well informed. Consequently, they have not carried out an effective quality assurance of leaders' various initiatives to improve attendance, or of work to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders' recent strategies and training for staff are valued by staff, but the pace of change has been too slow to see a significant improvement in outcomes. Senior leaders' analyses of the impact of their staff induction programmes, training and revised assessment systems are not sharp or robust enough, and do not allow sufficiently effective prioritisation of what works best.

External support

Leaders have worked with the local authority to audit safeguarding and have made some changes as a result. In addition, this year, they have worked with an external company to audit and target improvements in attendance, with some early signs demonstrating a slight reduction in the numbers of pupils who are persistently absent. However, this work has not reversed the decline in overall attendance figures. Leaders engage with external consultants and other schools and work with local partnerships. However, school monitoring systems are not robust enough to ensure that this work has sufficiently improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils or supported recently appointed middle leaders with subject planning and moderation.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry

Her Majesty's Inspector