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Miss Heather Scott
Headteacher
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Saltwell Road South
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Dear Miss Scott

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Joseph Swan Academy

Following my visit to your school on 30 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 April 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the governing body and staff. The inspector also met with a member of staff from the trust which has been brokered by the Department for Education to sponsor the school. The inspector met with a group of pupils to discuss their learning and carried out observations in lessons accompanied by the headteacher. The school's website and a wide range of additional documentation were evaluated prior to the inspection. The school's record of suitability checks on staff was reviewed. The inspector met with the subject leader for mathematics and, together, they examined and evaluated pupils' work.

A range of documents were scrutinised, including reports to governors, pupil progress information, behaviour and attendance records and senior leaders' evaluations of the school's work. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Immediately after the previous inspection, the chair of governors resigned. Since then, another three governors have also resigned. An acting chair led the governing body until the appointment of a new chair and vice-chair of governors in November 2018. Other governor vacancies have now been filled. The appointment of a new special educational needs coordinator in September 2018 enabled the headteacher to restructure the senior leadership team. Two senior leaders are now responsible for safeguarding and the development of subject leaders.

Following a period of due diligence, it has been announced that the school could soon be sponsored by the Emmanuel School's Foundation (the trust). It is anticipated that the formal process will be concluded prior to April 2019. However, the trust is supporting the school already. Shortly after this inspection, staff with expertise in English, mathematics, assessment, curriculum and administration will join a vice-principal from Emmanuel College in being based at Joseph Swan.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The quality of leadership and management is improving. The remaining members of the governing body conducted a skills audit following the previous inspection. This identified the need to appoint new governors from a wider range of backgrounds and who possess the skills to ask challenging questions of leaders. Governors are fully aware of the task ahead of them. However, astute governor appointments and effective external guidance are ensuring that, collectively, governors have a stronger understanding of their role in improving the education pupils receive. A review of governance was recommended following the previous inspection. However, leaders have not been able to conduct the review because until very recently there were vacancies on the governing body. Similarly, governors have not benefited from the wide range of training opportunities available to them. Consequently, some governors are not fully confident in their understanding of assessment information.

Leaders' plans to address the areas for improvement highlighted in the previous inspection report are thorough. An evaluation of the improvement plans demonstrates that the proposed actions are relevant, clear and specific. Furthermore, timings are appropriate, and it is clear by whom, when and how progress will be monitored. It is less clear how the training programme for staff intends to support or aid the completion of each action.

Staff say that leaders hold them to account more stringently than they did previously. This is because the headteacher has amended and clarified job descriptions and the responsibilities of senior leaders. Furthermore, strategies to support subject leaders are more transparent. For example, staff are given weekly and termly briefing information which outlines deadlines, foci for departments and

training that they are required to attend. Subject leaders conduct joint observations in lessons alongside senior leaders. This, and the opportunity for subject leaders to work with their counterparts in other outstanding schools, is improving the quality of teaching in most departments.

Leaders' strategies to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are starting to pay dividends. Pupils say that they have noticed the quality of teaching has improved and that teachers provide more opportunities to meet and discuss their learning or to get help with their homework. Leaders have reviewed and evaluated schemes of work to ensure that the activities pupils are asked to complete are suitably challenging. Leaders have also introduced more checks to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessment. As a result, teachers are able to plan lessons that more effectively meet the needs of pupils from their different starting points. There is still much work to do to ensure that teachers consistently challenge pupils. For example, the work scrutinised by the inspector highlighted that, in mathematics, pupils' current progress is weak. Leaders' checks on pupils' work had not identified that some teachers were setting work that was far too easy for pupils.

The previous inspection report stated that leaders should 'rigorously evaluate the use and impact of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils in their learning so that they make at least good progress'. Leaders acted swiftly to improve this aspect of the school's work. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium has been conducted and a further review is scheduled for January 2019. A senior leader is now responsible for the progress of disadvantaged pupils. He is ably supported by 'pupil premium champions' from each department. Together, they have ensured that improvement strategies are focused on improving disadvantaged pupils' progress in addition to their pastoral development. Staff now receive regular training that helps them support the substantial number of disadvantaged pupils in the school. The school's own information demonstrates that, more recently, disadvantaged pupils are making more progress, from their different starting points, than before the previous inspection.

Leaders were also asked to 'further improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils'. Staff appreciate the importance of developing positive working relationships with the families of disadvantaged pupils if rates of attendance are to improve. To this end, staff now run 'attendance matters' workshops in the community, so that parents and carers can meet attendance leaders at a time and place that is more appropriate to their needs. This ensures that staff have an improved understanding of the barriers some disadvantaged pupils are facing and helps parents and carers know the impact poor attendance is having on their child. Although the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils is improving, the overall rate of attendance for disadvantaged pupils has not improved.

Although the quality of pupils' behaviour was highlighted as a strength in the previous inspection report, leaders have acted to reinforce their expectations in this regard. Pupils say that the quality of behaviour in and around the school is much

better this term. They say that teachers apply the new behaviour management policy consistently and fairly. Pupils suggest that the reducing number of interruptions in class is helping them to concentrate more and improve their knowledge, skills and understanding further. Leaders use fixed-period and permanent exclusions appropriately. The school's own information demonstrates that the number of pupils who are excluded for a fixed period is reducing.

As a result of this monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

leaders and managers are taking effective action 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 governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gateshead. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Elliott

Her Majesty's Inspector