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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Alison Chapman
Headteacher
Baines School
Highcross Road
Poulton-le-Fylde
Lancashire
FY6 8BE

Dear Mrs Chapman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Baines School

Following my visit to your school on 18 December 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 taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- embed the current initiatives to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection so that they have more significant impact on pupils' outcomes
- continue to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils by building on recent improvements in their attendance
- ensure that the progress of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, the bursar, middle leaders, a group of teachers, the pupil premium champion and members of the governing body, including the chair. I also met with a representative of the local

authority. I spoke formally with a group of Year 10 and 11 pupils. I carried out observations of learning and looked at pupils' work. Some of these activities were undertaken jointly with a senior leader. I took account of documents provided by senior leaders and evaluated the school improvement plan. I reviewed the school's safeguarding policies and practices and checked the single central record.

Context

You were appointed headteacher shortly after the previous inspection. Significant staffing changes have taken place. New appointments include one deputy headteacher and three middle leaders. In total, 16 members of staff have left the school and 15 members of staff have joined the school. The school is fully staffed. A new chair and vice chair of the governing body have been appointed. Leaders and governors have taken the decision to close the school's sixth form from August 2019. There are 21 students in Year 13.

Main findings

Since your appointment in September 2017, you have worked with determination and resilience to bring about many positive changes in the school. You have a strong moral purpose and want pupils to thrive academically and personally. You are well supported by your governors and senior leadership team.

The school's motto, 'nothing without effort', underpins the work of the school. Staff are 'buying' into your vision and staff morale is improving. Staff say that you and your senior leaders are visible around the school and that communication has improved. A typical comment was: 'We are being led now and have more ownership of our areas.' Staff welcome the opportunities that you have provided to develop their skills, including visits to other schools and sharing the good practice with other colleagues within the school.

You have wasted no time in developing an improvement plan to address the key areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The actions are underpinned by clear timescales and success criteria, so that progress can be evaluated carefully. You have an honest and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. You know that there is still much to do to ensure that the school is good at the next inspection. The systems and procedures that you have put in place to improve the quality of education while not yet completely embedded are starting to have an impact.

You leave no stone unturned in your quest to improve outcomes for pupils in the school. You are keen for the school to be outward-facing and have been proactive in securing external support. Reviews by consultants and teaching schools have proved a useful stimulus for change. However, it is too early to see the full impact of this support.

The roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team have been refined to ensure greater accountability. Senior leaders have set higher targets for pupils, and check their progress more carefully through having regular meetings with middle leaders. Middle leaders are committed to improving the life chances of pupils at the school. They are taking increasing responsibility for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. Middle leaders are working closely with teachers within the school and other schools to check that their assessments are accurate. You recognise that the skills of middle leaders need to be developed further.

You and your senior leaders have implemented a wide range of strategies to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders are increasingly confident in evaluating what constitutes effective teaching. You have established clear routines for pupils to ensure that they bring the right equipment to lessons and are ready to learn. Most teachers are using assessment more effectively to plan lessons for the needs of different groups of pupils. Pupils are responding well to the higher expectations that teachers now have of them. I saw evidence of some teachers using questioning to make pupils think more deeply about their work. However, you acknowledge that further work needs to be done to ensure that teaching stretches and challenges middle-ability and higher-ability pupils. A review of pupils' work shows that most teachers follow the school's revised assessment policy and allow pupils to reflect on their knowledge and understanding. Despite the improvements that have been made, you recognise that staff need to implement teaching, learning and assessment policies consistently across the school.

Published outcomes for Year 11 in 2017 show that pupils, including the most able and disadvantaged pupils, did not make good progress from their starting points. This was partly due to a legacy of weaker teaching and a curriculum which did not meet the needs of pupils. Provisional outcomes for 2018 indicate improvements in a number of subjects. For example, pupils' progress in humanities has improved over the last three years and was broadly average in 2018. Leaders told me that this is because pupils are given more opportunities to write at length. Pupils' progress in mathematics declined in 2018. You and the subject leader for mathematics have introduced new strategies to improve outcomes in mathematics which are beginning to have an impact. Work in pupils' books and current assessment information show that attainment and progress are improving in a range of subjects. However, you recognise that further work is required to ensure that middle-ability pupils and high-ability pupils achieve as well they can.

The curriculum has been reviewed and refined so that it is more suited to the interests and abilities of pupils. For example, pupils now have access to a range of vocational courses including BTEC National Diploma courses in key stage 4. All pupils in Year 7 now study drama. You have made changes to the school timetable and more time is now available to deliver science across the school. Middle leaders across all subjects are reviewing and updating schemes of work. This is to ensure that the curriculum in their subject areas matches pupils' needs more closely at the school.

In 2017 and 2018 sixth-form students made below-average progress in some academic subjects. This was partly due to students not being on the right courses and a curriculum which was not fit for purpose. You have worked closely with the leader for sixth form to strengthen monitoring and evaluation. The school's own information shows that students' attainment in Year 13 is improving. However, you are aware that there is more to do to ensure that students make stronger progress. Leaders ensure that students have the opportunity to undertake suitable work experience. Students receive effective information, advice and guidance to help them prepare for their next steps.

In addition to the areas for inspection, I also looked at safeguarding. The culture of safeguarding at the school is strong. Pupils feel safe and know who to speak to if they have concerns. The newly appointed deputy headteacher has improved safeguarding procedures. Records are thorough. The single central record is well maintained and up to date. Recruitment checks on staff's suitability to work with children are detailed. Staff and governors have benefited from training in safeguarding. They know what to do should a concern about a pupil's welfare or safety arise. Leaders work well with a range of external agencies to protect pupils. Referrals are made effectively and in a timely manner.

Since the previous inspection, an increasing number of disadvantaged pupils have joined the school. You have responded to this by commissioning an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium. Leaders are acting on the findings of the report. They understand the barriers which disadvantaged pupils face. The newly appointed deputy headteacher has worked effectively with the pupil premium champion to devise plans to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Staff provide intervention and support for these pupils. You acknowledge that while the progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving it remains variable across the school.

Overall attendance is above the national average. However, disadvantaged pupils have had a higher rate of absence than other pupils. Leaders have raised the profile of the importance of good attendance, and explained the link with pupils' outcomes, through assemblies. You have employed an additional member of staff to increase the capacity of the attendance team. This has helped leaders and staff to work more closely with parents to follow up pupils' absences. Regular attendance is celebrated through rewards. These strategies are beginning to have a positive impact on some of these pupils. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is below that of other pupils nationally.

The number of fixed-term exclusions has been higher than national figures in the past. This is because leaders have raised expectations of what good behaviour looks like. Exclusions over time are reducing due to more effective behaviour systems and an improved rewards system. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school.

Pupils say that teaching and behaviour have improved since your arrival. They say that you are approachable and that they feel listened to. Pupils are very positive

about the wider range of cultural activities and visits available to them.

You are working to develop stronger links with parents and local community. You offer drop-in sessions for coffee to allow parents to speak about any concerns and find out what leaders can do to improve the school further. You have improved communication with parents. For example, you write fortnightly newsletters to keep parents informed of pupils' successes.

Governors are committed to the school's ethos. They bring a wide range of skills and experience to their roles and know the school well. They offer a good balance of support and challenge to you and your leaders.

External support

The local authority has provided you with regular challenge and support, including training for governors and a review of the curriculum which was conducted jointly with a national leader of education. The local authority adviser brokered effective support from external consultants to improve the quality of teaching in English and mathematics.

A range of teaching schools are providing strong ongoing support for a variety of areas. Ripley Teaching School Alliance Teaching School has provided support to improve teaching in modern foreign languages and business studies. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium and of religious studies was carried out by leaders from Broughton High School. Leaders from Red Rose Teaching School Alliance have carried out a review of history. You have also secured effective support from two experienced educational consultants. External support is helping you gain a more accurate view of the school's provision.

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

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector