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Mr I Brierly
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Brierly

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Paget High School

Following my visit to your school on 12 February 2019, 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:

- ensure that strategies to improve the progress of the most able pupils are implemented consistently across all subject areas, including in English
- ensure that leaders in the sixth form further develop students' independent study skills and improve support and challenge to subject areas where students are not making enough progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, pupils and the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke on the telephone to a representative from the local authority and the school improvement partner. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A series of short visits to lessons were undertaken and pupils' behaviour was observed at breaktime. Records of visits from the school improvement partner, governing body minutes and other relevant monitoring documents were evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. There have been new heads of department in mathematics and modern foreign languages and a new teaching head of sixth form. There is a new chair of the governing body and a number of new governors have been appointed.

Main findings

The majority of the strengths identified at the last inspection are still evident. Paget is a very inclusive school. Pupils commented on how 'everyone fits in' and that diversity is embraced and valued. Pupils feel safe. They value the well-being hub and know there are trusted adults to turn to if they have concerns.

You began work at the school in January 2018. You made sure that everyone understood that when they care best for pupils this helps pupils to achieve really well. You have focused on raising teachers' expectations of what your pupils can achieve. You gave teachers greater autonomy on how to raise standards in the classroom but set up systems and processes to carefully track that those improvements are being made. You took personal control of the pupil premium budget, which increased opportunity and support for disadvantaged pupils. You worked closely with pupils, raising their expectations and their pride in their school. Finally, you increased the accountability of middle leaders, ensuring that heads of department are held responsible for the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Evidence from conversations with pupils, governors and external advisers suggest that the mantra of 'be proud, aim high and work hard' has become a reality.

Pupils enthusiastically describe positive changes in the school. They like the smarter uniform and think it makes them more ready for work. They describe the school as stricter and 'consequences' are consistently enforced. They know this means they have a better learning environment and can get on with their work with less disruption.

The issues raised at the last inspection have been addressed with considerable urgency and significant improvements were evident during this visit.

Most pupils are now making consistently good progress. Year 11 pupils in 2018 made progress in line with other pupils nationally, a considerable improvement from 2017. There were particularly strong results in mathematics and humanities. Pupils did less well in languages. Pupils with low attainment on entry to the school and disadvantaged pupils made better progress than pupils did nationally. However, pupils with high attainment on entry did not make as much progress as other pupils nationally.

Performance information for current Year 11 pupils shows improvements in learning and pupils' progress have been sustained. There have been further improvements in science and languages. However, there is still some variation in performance between pupils with low and high prior attainment. Pupils with high attainment on entry, particularly boys, are still not making the progress or attaining the standards of which they are capable in some subjects, including English.

Outcomes have improved because teaching is better, pupils' progress is monitored more carefully and leaders have worked with pupils on building motivation and self-belief. Staff are clear about the expectations in their classroom and expectations are higher. Their training has included opportunities for teachers to share effective strategies on developing independence and helping pupils to think hard about their work. The methods used to improve learning are being implemented effectively in most classrooms. All lessons in key stage 3 begin with a single question, part of the strategy of 'teach to the top' so teachers have the highest expectations of all pupils. Pupils' performance is closely monitored and effective action taken quickly if pupils fall behind. Disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress because pupil premium funding is more effectively targeted. Its impact is properly evaluated through rigorous monitoring and the information gained informs a systematic intervention programme for those pupils who need extra help.

Since the last inspection, there has been considerable focus on improving the way that achievement information is monitored and analysed. Teachers set pupils challenging targets. Following a data collection point, heads of department are expected to reflect on the performance of their subject against those targets and identify strategies to improve outcomes for groups, classes or individuals. Regular meetings then take place between the leadership team and heads of department to discuss the quality and impact of those interventions to see if they are working or not.

You have been keen to empower your middle leaders, making sure they are fully responsible for their subject areas and lead them effectively. There are clear expectations about monitoring activities, including checks on books and regular walks through lessons as well as more formal observations of teaching. Additional coaching support or targeted professional development workshops are offered to staff to help improve their teaching practice.

You have introduced a more consistent approach to the management of behaviour.

Staff and pupils are clear about the consequences that are applied for poor behaviour. Senior leaders are more visible in the corridors and classrooms and provide support to teachers in addressing the causes of poor behaviour. School statistics show that there is less disruption in lessons. Since the last inspection, there are fewer exclusions and pupils are less likely to be referred to the school's behaviour reflection unit.

Despite the rapid improvement in pupils' progress at key stage 4, a similar pattern is not evident in post-16 performance. A-level progress was significantly below the national level in 2017 and 2018. There was considerable variation between subjects, with sociology students doing well but students did not make enough progress in psychology, English literature, chemistry and physics. Students did well on vocational courses in 2017 but this did not continue into 2018, when progress was significantly below national levels. You recognise that improving outcomes in the sixth form is a key priority for the school. You have appointed a new head of sixth form with considerable post-16 teaching experience and reorganised your leadership team to add more capacity to this team. They have prioritised reducing the number of U grades and current data suggests that the number of U grades will be significantly reduced this academic year. Students in the sixth form have had additional support to organise their study time better and teachers have had additional training to improve their post-16 teaching.

There have been significant changes in the governing body since the last inspection. The current acting chair of the governing body took on the role in October 2018 and has rapidly developed a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. He shares your high expectations of staff and pupils. Governors' understanding is considerably enhanced by very detailed termly reports from you. They include a thorough analysis of current pupils' performance and suitable evaluations of progress against the school improvement priorities. External reports from the school improvement partner provide further information for governors about the quality of education provided and the standards achieved. Governors have ongoing training from senior leaders to help them understand and interpret national performance data. Governors meet their safeguarding responsibilities and carefully check the impact of pupil premium spending. Link governors take responsibility for key departments and visit school so they have a first-hand understanding of the work of their department and its impact.

The school improvement plan is focused on improving the areas identified as weaknesses at the last inspection. Each section includes the strategic intent as well as the tasks that need to be carried out to ensure that success criteria and the milestones to be achieved are met. Monitoring and evaluation strategies suitably involve external bodies and governors as well as senior leaders to ensure that judgements made about provision and outcomes are subject to external scrutiny and validation. Progress against actions in the plan is carefully evaluated and shared termly with governors. Actions identified in the external reviews of governance and pupil premium, recommended at the last inspection, have been put in place.

External support

The school has effective partnerships with a number of external bodies and you are open to seeking help where it is needed. You value the regular visits from your school improvement partner, commissioned through Staffordshire local authority. You have used these visits to carry out paired observations of teaching and to focus on areas of concern including English, humanities and the most able.

School leaders have also worked with the John Taylor High School, participating in a nationally funded project, focused on improving outcomes in English. Weekly visits from English specialists allow English teachers to share ideas and expertise. This is already having an impact, with improved teaching strategies, better modelling of answers and greater clarity for pupils about required examination skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah James
Ofsted Inspector