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15 May 2019

Mr Tony Rogerson
Acting Principal
The Mandeville School
Ellen Road
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Dear Mr Rogerson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Mandeville School

Following my visit to your school on 25 April 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:

- develop teachers' subject knowledge so that it is consistently strong and better used to provide pupils with greater challenge in their learning.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting principal, who was accompanied by senior leaders along with the executive headteacher from a local school, the chair of the governing body, along with five other governors, a group of pupils, a group of staff and a group of middle leaders. The lead inspector also held

meetings with designated safeguarding leaders, a representative from the local authority and the head of the sixth form. Short visits were made to classes, accompanied by senior leaders on two separate occasions. Information relating to the checks made on staff when they are appointed was examined, and a sample of pupils' work was scrutinised. A phone call was made to the local authority's designated officer.

Context

The principal is currently absent and there is an acting principal in place, who was previously the senior vice principal. There have been a number of changes to the senior team. The senior team now consists of two acting vice principals, a vice principal and two acting assistant vice principals. A new chair of the governing body was appointed in February 2019.

Main findings

The approaches you have recently introduced are taking the school in the right direction, following a period when improvements in some areas were too slow. By working effectively with the executive headteacher of a local school and the local authority, you have successfully placed the school on a surer footing. You, and the other leaders, are more rigorous than previously and determined to improve the school. This resolve is now having a positive impact on most pupils' daily experiences.

Last academic year, changes were mainly focused on implementing the 16 to 19 study programmes and improving the culture of the school, including behaviour and attendance. However, they were not sufficiently focused on developing teachers' subject expertise and improving teaching. Because of this, although some areas for development outlined in the previous inspection report improved well, other important aspects did not. In particular, the quality of pupils' learning and the expectations that teachers had of pupils were too low. Since January 2019, senior leaders and subject leaders have vigorously focused on improving assessment and the quality of teaching. Broadly speaking, this renewed drive is working well. For example, there is now greater consistency in the feedback that teachers give to pupils, which is helping them to improve their work. However, too many lessons are covered by supply teachers or taught by teachers who do not have sufficient subject knowledge.

Leaders have worked hard to ensure that all aspects of the 16 to 19 study programmes are fully implemented. The provision in the sixth form is now compliant and all students currently in Year 13 undertook work experience at the end of Year 12. However, the approach taken to organising work experience placements was not considered carefully enough. Some students' placements were linked to their future goals and were aspirational but too many placements did not support students in their next steps. For example, some students worked more hours in the

part-time jobs they already had, which had no link with their future career aspirations. Year 13 students now also participate in a programme of life skills delivered by a commercial organisation. Not enough thought has been placed on ensuring that the programme meets the needs of all the students, especially the most able students. Some tasks were low level and not demanding. Several students told the inspector that although it was useful when they first embarked upon it, the programme was less useful now. They questioned whether the three-hour slot dedicated to the programme each week might be better used for revision, especially given the fact that A-level examinations start in May. Leaders have plans in place to develop work experience and life-skills programmes for next academic year.

Two notable areas of success are attendance and some aspects of behaviour. Leaders have effectively reduced persistent absence and improved pupils' overall attendance. Attendance to date this academic year is above the national average for secondary schools for the last academic year. Through precisely focused approaches that have been very intensely monitored, persistent absent rates have also fallen. Exclusions have also reduced since September 2019. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour was generally better, especially outside of lessons. They added that there were inconsistencies in the way that teachers managed pupils' behaviour in class, with some teachers being much more effective than others.

Subject leaders now play a greater role in leading developments in learning and training teachers from a subject-specific perspective. This has led to some strong improvements in subjects, such as in mathematics, English and history. Senior leaders have worked alongside the local authority to develop year group and subject leaders. Many feel more confident about the role and what it entails, including monitoring the implementation of whole-school and subject-specific approaches. As a result, there is now greater consistency in the way that teachers use different forms of feedback to support pupils with their learning. This was seen in pupils' books and in observations in classes. For instance, teachers' feedback was helping pupils fill any gaps in their learning on specific topics in mathematics in key stage 4. Pupils spoke favourably about the feedback that they received, commenting that it helped them to work out what they needed to focus upon going forward. The new approach to the start of lessons which has been put in place over the last school term is also well embedded in most classes. As a consequence, lessons are starting more purposefully.

Across the school there is variability in teachers' subject knowledge. For instance, in English teachers use their subject knowledge well to explain misconceptions and ask probing questions. However, using subject knowledge well to boost pupils' learning is not yet a consistent feature of teaching across the school. For example, in some geography classes the tasks set did not build on pupils' prior learning and did not enable them to acquire the depth of knowledge that they needed. Pupils told the inspector that teaching varied. For example, it was not as strong in science as other subjects. One reason for this is because of the high degree of turbulence in the

science department which has meant that some lessons are taught by teachers who are not subject specialists or are cover teachers. The new head of department has put in place a number of effective short-term solutions to this situation but recognises that they are not sustainable. Leaders are keenly aware of the issues in science and inconsistencies in challenge. They are determined to ensure that improvements in teaching go from strength to strength.

Governance has now stabilised following a very turbulent period after the previous inspection, during which the governing body did not perform well. At this time a review of governance was undertaken. However, recommendations made in the review were not fully acted upon because governance was too focused on other aspects. Since then the make-up of the governing body has changed. It is leaner and sharper and there is a new chair in place. A number of governors with expertise in education have been recruited and are making a positive contribution to the work of the governing body.

Governors realise that in the past they were not sufficiently challenging and the local authority has raised this as an issue. Governors fully accepted this challenge, embracing the support from the authority that has accompanied it. Members of the governing body are committed to improving this aspect of their work.

External support

The support provided by the local authority has been more effective than previously, with greater collaboration between the school and the authority since the end of last calendar year. The local authority has provided strong support for the acting principal. Of note is the close and effective partnership between the acting principal and the executive headteacher of a local school that rapidly improved, which was brokered by the local authority. In addition, the local authority has effectively supported the governing body, assisting with specific staffing issues as well as with training and development.

At the moment the local authority is providing extensive assistance, including support for leaders in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The authority's representatives are also checking the accuracy of assessments and working closely with individual teachers. Senior leaders are rightly beginning to evaluate the impact of the support and suggesting how it might be refined. For example, they are sensibly requesting that external support is focused on developing subject-specific expertise in non-core subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector