

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Judith Schafer
Beacon Hill Community School
Market Square
Aspatria
Wigton
Cumbria
CA7 3EZ

Dear Mrs Schafer

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Beacon Hill Community School

Following my visit to your school on 1 May 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:

- subject leaders and teachers place a greater focus on the most important knowledge that they want pupils to remember in preparation for future learning
- teachers check that pupils' knowledge is secure before they move onto more difficult tasks.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders. I observed pupils learning during lessons alongside a subject leader. I scrutinised the work of Year 9 pupils in English and mathematics with a subject leader. I also considered a range of documentation relating to school improvement, including leaders' self-evaluation. I evaluated the school improvement plan.

I spoke with a representative from the local authority on the telephone and a national leader of education (NLE), currently providing support to the school. I also spoke on the telephone with the executive director of people at Cumbria county council. I met with a group of pupils, a group of subject leaders and three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.

I checked on leaders' systems to ensure that adults at the school are safe to work with pupils. I also spoke with staff about the procedures at the school to keep pupils safe.

Context

Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have formed a federation, the Cumbria Futures Federation (CFF), with another local school. A new governing body has been appointed and a new chair of governors was appointed in September 2018. There have also been some changes to staffing, including the appointment of three subject-specialist teachers in the science department.

Main findings

You lead by example to ensure that staff at every level reflect upon and refine their practice. For instance, you have strengthened the leadership of the school by providing effective training to develop the skills of subject leaders. Subject leaders feel well supported by you and your senior leadership team. They appreciate the opportunity to work alongside other subject specialists, both within the CFF and through effective links with other local schools.

You and your deputy headteacher have been quick to capitalise on the additional resources the CFF can offer. For example, pupils now benefit from subject-specialist teaching in science and history. Leaders at every level are keen to benefit from advice and implement recommendations from external experts.

You have embraced and implemented recommendations offered by an NLE to improve the quality of leaders' improvement planning. As a result, your plans to improve the school are highly relevant and focused. There are clear targets and milestones in place. This helps leaders and governors to check on the progress made in each area. You have also clearly identified those staff who are accountable for specific areas, for example, subject leaders. Consequently, there have been improvements in how well leaders and teachers are held to account. Members of the governing body have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school, as well as those aspects that require further development. Since the previous inspection, governors have remained up to date with key issues through relevant training. Consequently, the governing body hold leaders to account more diligently.

You have improved the systems used to monitor the quality of teaching. These systems are allowing teachers to benefit from appropriate training. For example,

since the previous inspection, there have been greater opportunities for teachers to work on and develop their own subject knowledge. Teachers are highly motivated, and morale is high. They are keen to develop professionally and refine their practice further. More pupils benefit from teaching that is routinely good than at the time of the previous inspection. Thus, there have been improvements in outcomes for pupils. The overall progress made by pupils at the end of key stage 4 has improved year on year.

The overwhelming majority of teachers have high expectations of pupils. This is having a positive effect on the proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades in their GCSE examinations. Teachers are challenging pupils more often. For instance, most teachers provide pupils with opportunities to solve problems, investigate and reason. This is especially the case in mathematics. However, there are times when teachers move onto more complex tasks before pupils' knowledge of basic concepts is secure. This is particularly the case for those pupils who have lower-than-average starting points.

The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend the school is higher than the national average. Leaders and governors ensure that additional funding for this group of pupils is spent effectively. These pupils benefit from a range of carefully tailored support. For example, leaders identify the differences in the knowledge of disadvantaged pupils. Teachers then give more attention to what pupils need to learn to overcome any omissions in their learning. Many disadvantaged pupils choose to join the school part way through a key stage because of the high-quality pastoral support that leaders and staff can offer. The differences in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils at the school and other pupils nationally are diminishing.

Pupils appreciate the benefits that a close-knit school community can offer. They liken the school to a family and feel well cared for by staff. Pupils are especially positive about the changes that leaders have made to the curriculum. Leaders have carefully considered the knowledge and skills most desirable to a range of local employers. Leaders have used this information to design a curriculum that better prepares pupils for the opportunities available to them when they leave school. For example, strong and effective links with a local college mean that pupils can now study engineering courses at key stage 4. There are also opportunities for pupils to work alongside local employers regularly. These projects allow pupils to develop their oracy and leadership skills. Year 9 pupils explained to me how such projects are helping them to become more confident and have a greater awareness of the opportunities that a good education can offer.

Leaders have also made use of the resources within the CFF to broaden the curriculum offer for pupils. For example, more pupils are choosing to study history and a modern foreign language at key stage 4. Improvements in careers education, information, advice and guidance for pupils are helping to raise their aspirations. More pupils remain in further education, employment or training at the end of key

stage 4 than at the time of the previous inspection. Nonetheless, within each subject, some subject leaders and teachers are not clear about the most important knowledge that they intend pupils to remember. For example, some pupils do not have a secure enough knowledge of essential subject-specific vocabulary before they move onto future learning.

Leaders' systems to check that staff at the school are safe to work with pupils are effective. Staff understand the procedures they must follow if they have concerns about a pupil. They are confident that pupils are safe in school. Those pupils who I spoke with explained to me how they feel safe in school. They trust staff to deal effectively with any issues or concerns they may have.

External support

Leaders are keen to learn from external support and implement recommendations provided by external experts. For instance, external support is having a positive effect on securing improvements in the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils in English. External support is also helping to develop leaders' skills. For instance, support from an NLE has been effective in refining leaders' improvement planning.

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

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory
Her Majesty's Inspector