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Stacey Jordan
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Jordan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Telford Priory School

Following my visit to your academy on 18 June 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 academy 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 a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

Senior leaders and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The academy should take further action to:

- ensure that teacher expectations are consistently high and that they expect all pupils to actively engage in learning activities throughout the lesson
- work with pupils to raise and higher their expectations from compliance with the behaviour code to being active and engaged learners, demonstrating a consistently positive attitude to learning
- improve further the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, particularly those who regularly miss school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior

leaders and the multi-academy trust chief executive officer to discuss the actions taken, and their impact, since the last inspection. A series of short visits to lessons were undertaken, accompanied by senior leaders. Pupils' behaviour was observed at breaktime. I met a group of Year 8 pupils and talked to other pupils during the day. I looked at work in pupils' books and evaluated performance information, particularly how well current pupils are achieving. The school improvement plans were evaluated, along with records of recent external evaluations of the school's work, including the review of pupil premium funding.

Main findings

Since the last inspection staffing has remained very stable. Your leadership team, which was very new at the time of the inspection has now had time to suitably grow and develop. They have a deeper understanding of their roles and responsibilities and better capacity to deliver the changes required to improve the quality of education provided. This increased capacity, alongside effective support from the trust and your determined pursuit of a consistent application of school expectations by staff and pupils, has allowed the school to make good progress in addressing previous weaknesses.

School improvement plans are detailed, relevant and reviewed every half-term when they are shared with the education advisory board (EAB). They address all the issues identified in the 2018 inspection report and provide leaders with a structured approach to their school improvement work. A pupil premium review was undertaken in October 2018, as recommended at the last inspection. The review found that the school's priorities were effectively based upon an evaluation of the actions of the previous year. Leaders have an accurate sense of the areas identified for improvement and can discuss their explicit strategies to address them. The school is making good use of research findings as well as ideas from your own staff and links with other schools to improve provision and outcomes for those that are disadvantaged.

In lessons, pupils are usually well behaved, working quietly and willing to answer teachers' questions. There is a welcoming learning environment with lots of pupils' work on display and a calm atmosphere in classrooms. When teaching is most effective, there is evidence of well-structured learning activities with high teacher expectations leading to good levels of challenge. Pupils clearly enjoy opportunities in music and art to immerse themselves in practical work. However, in some lessons teacher expectations are too low and pupils are able to avoid producing their own answers, instead waiting for the teacher to go through the correct responses.

There is a growing focus on developing literacy skills across key stage 3. Small groups of pupils in Years 7 and 8 receive a programme of lessons to improve their reading and comprehension skills. The Year 8 nurture group were confidently reading aloud and trying to make sense of unfamiliar words. Some books show

good evidence of individuals developing key vocabulary well, although this is not yet consistent across all subjects.

The school has carefully developed a rigorous tracking process to evaluate pupils' attainment and progress. Assessments are carefully prepared by departments to ensure that they contain work from earlier topics and reflect the knowledge and skills that are required for that subject. Following the collection of assessment information, senior and subject leaders effectively analyse the performance of different groups of pupils. Class teachers then produce a raising achievement plan that highlights how they will change their teaching strategies to help address gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. As a result of better teaching and more targeted intervention, there is clear evidence that pupils in all year groups are making better progress.

There have been small improvements in attendance but pastoral leaders still struggle to engage all families with the culture of regular school attendance. A significant proportion of disadvantaged pupils are regularly absent from school. Tutors are in the front line of improving attendance, with support from heads of house and pupil support officers to address very poor attendance. You recognise that this work has not led to the expected improvements in attendance and so the school has recently appointed an education welfare officer to add extra capacity to this crucial priority.

You demonstrate an absolute commitment to inclusion and valuing every child that is now widely accepted and supported across the school. The introduction of the MacArthur Centre, a small area in school where vulnerable pupils receive additional help and support is a valuable resource. The centre has had a considerable impact on reducing the number of pupils excluded, improving attendance and pupils' motivation and self-worth and ensures that the most vulnerable complete their education within the main school.

Pupils describe how behaviour in the school has improved because of the clear system of rewards and sanctions that are in place. Leaders recognise that behaviour management has generally delivered compliance in classrooms. The focus of their work is now on developing better attitudes to learning so pupils choose to work hard and behave well rather than not. The number of pupils who receive a fixed-term exclusion for poor behaviour is still above average but reducing.

External reviews and pupil surveys indicate the great majority of pupils feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they are worried or have a concern. They value the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities available every day. A small group of pupils raised concerns that they did not always feel that staff dealt effectively with pupils who were teasing or treating other pupils badly. Leaders are aware of these concerns and reviewing their actions to support these pupils better.

The chief education/executive officer of the trust leads the school's EAB. The board

meets every four weeks ensuring that there are frequent checks on the school's progress toward reaching the targets and milestones set in improvement plans. Governors/ board members have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are able to direct support and resources from across the trust drive improvement key priority areas. The trust provides effective support to the school through a fortnightly visit from a national leader of education, who provides appropriate coaching and mentoring support for the headteacher. The school works closely with three other local secondary schools to improve aspects of the school's work, for example, special educational needs education and widening training opportunities. There are a number of staff development programmes available to teaching and support staff in developing the skills needed to be a better teacher or leader.

External support

Leaders value the additional support provided by the trust. They have acted rapidly on recommendations from peer reviews, the pupil premium review and other advisors. You recognise that the improvements noted above are in part due to your willingness to work with the trust and your partner schools in finding the best solutions to improve outcomes and the quality of education provided for your pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Telford & Wrekin. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah James
Ofsted Inspector