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Mr Andrew Lund
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lund

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Appleby Grammar School

Following my visit to your school on 12 September 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken 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 three 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 last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- continue to develop the subjects within the curriculum offer so that pupils' learning is carefully sequenced in order to help them know more and remember.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, two members of the governing body, and a representative from the South Lakes Federation to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Further meetings were held with pupils, members of the teaching staff and subject leads of French,

mathematics and science. I reviewed the school's self-evaluation document and the improvement plan. I also visited some lessons during the day.

Context

Since the last inspection, four new members of staff have been appointed to the English, mathematics, science and computing departments. A new sixth form leader is in place.

Main findings

You, the governors and other leaders have worked hard to bring about the necessary improvement required in the school. This has taken time, but it has borne fruit. Teaching is stronger, and pupils' progress is improving. There is now a firm foundation for future improvements to ensure that different groups of pupils benefit from a good quality education.

You have appropriate plans in place to tackle the areas for improvement left at the previous inspection. The plans state clearly when and how you will measure success. You, other leaders and governors check these plans carefully to ensure that your actions are bringing about the desired impact.

You have ensured that teachers have been provided with appropriate training to enable them to help pupils achieve well. Many of your teachers have been researching different ways to ensure that pupils are challenged during learning. The most successful strategies are being shared with all staff and this is beginning to inform curriculum development in different subject departments. However, while the signs of this work are promising, it is still early days. Therefore, the quality of challenge within the curriculum across different subjects remains mixed.

You have worked with the South Lakes Federation to help teachers to improve their use of assessment. Teachers regularly use verbal and written assessments to provide feedback to pupils. Pupils told me that they find this feedback helpful.

You have provided training to help all teachers to support pupils with their writing. More pupils are now structuring their written work effectively. They match the style of their writing to their audience. Teachers confidently correct pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. As a result, pupils' writing is improving. Pupils are able to describe complex ideas and processes using subject specific vocabulary.

You and your leaders are developing a coherent curriculum across a number of subjects to enable pupils to know and remember more. You have fostered strong links with local primary schools. Leaders and teachers work closely with colleagues from these primary schools. Subject leaders now have a better understanding of what pupils already know when they arrive in Year 7. They ensure that the curriculum at key stage 3 builds on what pupils have learned at key stage 2.

Most subject leaders are thinking carefully about the key knowledge that pupils need for their subject during their time in key stage 3. Some leaders have decided how this learning will be organised to ensure that pupils make strong progress. For example, in French there is a renewed focus on phonics and grammar at the start of Year 7. The pupils that I spoke to said that in the subjects where they learn best, 'teachers teach things in the right order'.

Many of your teachers now have higher expectations of what their pupils already know and can do when they enter your school. However, some leaders continue to view key stage 3 as preparation time for key stage 4. These leaders and teachers continue to focus on what pupils need to be able to do in their GCSE examinations rather than developing a depth of knowledge across their subject areas. This is preventing some pupils in some subjects from gaining the knowledge and skills that they need to succeed. Some subjects are still working towards providing the full depth and breadth of the national curriculum at key stage 3.

Leaders and teachers talk very positively about the development of the key stage 3 curriculum. They are now bringing the same strategies to the development of the key stage 4 curriculum.

External support

The school continues to draw on help and support from local schools and academies through the South Lakes Federation. This provides opportunities for peer review by leaders of other schools within the federation. Subject leaders and teachers from across the collaboration are able to meet and exchange ideas and share best practice. The partnership with an outstanding teaching school and a national leader in education has been particularly helpful in developing the quality of leadership at all levels.

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

Erica Sharman

Her Majesty's Inspector