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Mrs Lesley Gwinnett
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Gwinnett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wellfield High School

Following my visit to your school on 24 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 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:

- continue to improve the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent, particularly those who are disadvantaged
- build on the work already done to develop curriculum plans, so that pupils acquire the knowledge that they need to progress through the curriculum in all subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, pupils, members of the governing body and one representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I made

short visits to lessons, spoke with pupils and looked at work in their books. Some of these activities were undertaken jointly with a senior leader. I examined a range of documentation, including the school improvement plan. I reviewed the school's safeguarding policies and checked the single central record on the suitability of staff to work with children.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced some changes in staffing. Three teachers left at the end of the summer term. Five members of staff joined the school in September 2019. Two curriculum leaders have also been seconded to the extended leadership team to develop their skills further and to strengthen capacity. The membership of the governing body has changed substantially. A new chair and vice-chair of governors have been appointed. The executive headteacher is working effectively with governors and the local authority to reduce the school's budget deficit.

Senior leaders and governors are in the process of seeking approval from the regional schools commissioner and the Department for Education for the school to join the Endeavour Learning Trust.

Main findings

You, together with your senior leaders and governors, are determined to provide the best possible quality of education for pupils at the school. In response to the findings of the previous inspection, you put together an action plan that was focused on the correct priorities. You and your senior team have worked hard to build on the positive developments seen in the last inspection. There are tangible signs of improvement in many important areas.

You have not shied away from making difficult leadership decisions in the best interests of pupils. You have reviewed how staff are deployed to ensure that the right people are in the right posts. You have strengthened your team of middle leaders. You ensure that they receive effective training and support to develop their leadership skills. Staff buy into your vision and their morale continues to be high. Staff and pupils who spoke with me believe that the school is moving in the right direction.

Your monitoring and evaluation of the school's work are accurate. You are currently in the process of further refining your development plans to build on the improvements already made. You, together with your senior leaders and governors, are determined to make Wellfield High School a good school by the time it is next inspected.

Since the previous inspection, an external review of governance has been carried out. It recommended a range of actions which have been implemented. Governance

under the new chair has improved. New governors bring a range of useful skills and expertise to their roles. Minutes of governing body meetings show that they ask probing questions to hold leaders to account. Governors know the school well.

Also, since the last inspection you have sharpened the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. Staff value the training opportunities that they have to work with teachers and lead practitioners from other schools in the Endeavour Learning Trust. This is helping staff to share best practice and improve their teaching skills and the curriculum.

Pupils appreciate the improvements in teaching, including in mathematics and science. You have ensured that all subjects are now taught by subject specialists. You have focused on embedding non-negotiables for classroom teachers and clear routines in lessons so that pupils are ready to learn. In my short visits to lessons, I found that most pupils behave well and show positive attitudes to learning. Most teachers use their subject knowledge well to probe pupils' thinking and to clear up any misconceptions. Pupils learn new knowledge in a sensible order. Lower-ability pupils are well supported in lessons using a range of effective strategies. Some teachers use information well to provide challenging curriculum goals so that pupils can develop and extend their knowledge and understanding. However, you acknowledge that there is further work to do here.

You have reviewed the curriculum and are making a number of changes to meet pupils' needs. Leaders are working closely with local primary schools to develop subject curriculum plans in key stage 3. This is helping pupils to build on their knowledge and understanding from key stage 2 to key stage 3. You have created a 'nurture group' for a small group of pupils with low starting points. This is helping them to become ready for mainstream education and GCSEs.

Subject leaders are collaborating effectively with staff in other schools in the trust to review their schemes of work and assessments. You know that there is further work to do to ensure that pupils acquire the knowledge that they need to progress through the curriculum in all subjects.

That said, the improvements made to teaching are having a positive impact on pupils' progress across the curriculum. Provisional examination results in 2019 indicate that pupils' progress improved in a range of subjects, including in mathematics and science.

Pupils told me that the behaviour management system is used well. Boys have benefited from these improvements. They are making better progress than was the case at the last inspection.

You commissioned a review of the pupil premium funding and acted upon the findings. You have developed effective strategies for the use of additional funding and you check on the impact that it is having on disadvantaged pupils' learning

across the curriculum. Disadvantaged pupils also benefit from a range of visits. These pupils are now provided with better arrangements for careers advice and guidance. Disadvantaged pupils have made better progress this year than previously.

You have given literacy a higher profile across the school. There is an effective whole-school focus on developing pupils' vocabulary skills. Work in books shows that pupils have opportunities to develop subject-specific vocabulary.

You have reviewed and refined the strategies to improve pupils' attendance. Tutors and progress leaders check and follow up on pupils' attendance. High attendance is celebrated through rewards. The attendance team is working tirelessly to support parents and carers in getting their children to attend school. Staff follow up absences quickly and involve external agencies where needed. As a result, the overall rate of pupils' attendance is improving. However, persistent absence, particularly for those who are disadvantaged, remains above the national average.

Safeguarding arrangements remain effective. You ensure that staff appointed to work at the school are suitable to work with pupils. Governors who spoke with me are aware of potential safeguarding risks in the local area. They work closely with leaders to ensure that staff and pupils receive appropriate safeguarding training. Pupils feel safe. They generally behave well around school. Most pupils show respect for each other during breaktimes. They socialise well in the dining hall, where behaviour is calm and orderly.

External support

The local authority knows the school well. It brokered the support of a specialist leader of education (SLE) from a local school to develop the geography department. The school has continued to derive considerable benefit from its partnership with Endeavour Learning Trust. The trust has provided effective support. This includes carrying out a review of pupil premium spending and helping to recruit specialist staff. The trust is also helping to develop the skills of senior and middle leaders, develop the curriculum, and to improve teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector