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Mr Thomas Gledhill
Bury Secondary Pupil Referral Unit Spring Lane School
Spring Lane
Radcliffe
Greater Manchester
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Dear Mr Gledhill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bury Secondary Pupil Referral Unit Spring Lane School

Following my visit to your school on 28 November 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. I would like to thank your assistant headteacher, Angela Ball, for the help she gave me in your unavoidable absence. I would also like to thank her for the time she and other senior leaders 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 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- make leaders' action plans more precise, especially regarding the intended impact of their actions
- provide training and develop strategies to boost pupils' performance in literacy
- ensure that the school's website is compliant and remains so.

Evidence

During my visit, I met with the assistant headteachers from all three sites. I also met with a group of pupils and talked informally throughout the day with other pupils. I met with two representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions

taken since the last inspection and the level of support provided. I met with the chair of governors, along with two other governors who are also senior leaders. I met with two representatives of a local trust who provide external support for the school. I spoke on the telephone with three parents. I looked at a variety of documentation, including the school's improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings and documents connected with safeguarding. The assistant headteacher and I carried out a series of joint visits to classrooms to look at pupils' work in mathematics, design technology, food technology and history. This included work in books where possible.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the Radcliffe site now caters only for pupils in key stage 3. Leaders have directly employed teaching staff, replacing the agency staff that were previously in place. Two senior leaders have left the Radcliffe site. The current assistant headteacher was subsequently promoted to her post from within the school. The number of pupils who have an education, health and care plan has increased from one to 20 since the last inspection.

Main findings

You have an action plan in place that refers to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. However, the actions you have included lack detail in places. There are no statements about the intended impact of leaders' actions. The plan would benefit from greater precision in these areas to help you to focus your work on continuing the improvements you have brought about.

Teachers have higher expectations of work and behaviour than previously. They have strong subject knowledge. They are better at organising lessons, with resources that are appropriate and that support the learning effectively. Teachers check pupils' understanding as lessons go on. They provide help as needed so that pupils know more and remember more. They give pupils work that is demanding enough and makes them think hard. This was especially the case in history and mathematics. For example, in history in Year 9, teachers expect pupils to make inferences from historical evidence when they are studying the industrial revolution.

You have revised your formal assessment processes to get a clearer picture of how well pupils are doing. These include tests when pupils start at the school to make sure that teachers match work to all pupils' needs. You also have a better system for analysing pupils' emotional development and their attitudes to learning.

You have substantially improved the stability of staffing by moving away from solely using teachers from agencies. You now employ staff directly and have made sure that they have a good range of subject knowledge to match the curriculum you provide. You organised an external review of mathematics in the school and have acted on its recommendations. These include providing training in mathematics to

staff to strengthen the teaching of that subject. Teachers' improving subject knowledge makes a considerable contribution to making sure that the quality of education at the Radcliffe site is strengthened to be more like that at the other two sites.

You have redesigned the curriculum in line with the Radcliffe site's new purpose as a unit for key stage 3 pupils only. There are more practical activities, such as food technology. New features, such as drama, support the development of pupils' confidence and communication. Pupils who spoke with me said they enjoy this. Visits to places such as a farm excite and interest pupils. Leaders are currently training a member of staff to lead outdoor learning programmes to develop pupils' resilience and teamwork. New 'enrichment days', which include educational trips and visitors to school, broaden the curriculum for pupils. It is also clear from seeing pupils' positive responses in class that most find the subjects provided engaging and interesting.

Pupils who spoke with me said that they feel safe in school and trust staff to help them. They enjoy new features of the curriculum such as drama and educational visits. They said their teachers make them work hard and they told me their favourite subjects. Preferences included physical education, food technology and mathematics. They said they feel more 'comfortable' in this school than their previous ones. However, most were keen to move back into mainstream schools, suggesting improving attitudes to learning.

There are still several pupils across the three sites who are persistently absent. A number of these pupils miss school because of medical, mental health or family circumstances. However, most pupils improve their attendance compared with that at their previous school. You have a wider range of strategies in place to challenge pupils' absence and encourage good attendance. The improving curriculum contributes to this. You also have new attendance contracts and rewards for pupils who have high attendance.

Governors make close checks on you and your senior leaders. They have made sure that you have acted promptly to try to secure the required improvements. Leaders now have a clearer and more consistent view of pupils' progress and development. The new 'triad' system allows leaders to evaluate pupils' academic, emotional and behavioural achievements. Your analysis shows that most pupils are making good progress in their attitudes to learning. You have identified that there is still some work needed to improve literacy. You have acquired help from the local authority to provide training and guidance on how to support pupils' literacy skills more effectively.

The school's behaviour policy details appropriate sanctions and rewards. It now has de-escalation strategies at its heart. I witnessed this approach being successfully implemented on a few occasions around school. Staff understand the policy and act on it. You have also rearranged lunchtimes and breaktimes to enable better

management of behaviour. You have provided a wider range of activities for pupils to do. These include sports activities such as football, and opportunities to play computer games indoors. The result of all these actions is that pupils' behaviour is substantially improving.

I spoke on the telephone with three parents. They were all very positive about the school. They said that their child has benefited from attending there. They feel well informed on all aspects of their child's progress. Words such as 'absolutely brilliant', and 'caring, loving, understanding and patient' characterise their comments.

I looked at the school's website and discovered that there are several aspects that do not comply with the government's guidance. These include issues with: information about the curriculum; information about governors; information about extra funding, such as the pupil premium; and information about provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. You have undertaken to rectify these as soon as possible.

Safeguarding is effective. The school's systems are thorough and fit for purpose. Records are detailed and there are prompt responses to concerns. Training records show that staff are well trained in safeguarding matters. The school's record of checks on the suitability of staff is compliant with the government's requirements. A few minor administrative issues were resolved very easily during my visit.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support. This has allowed you to manage successfully some issues with staff underperformance. Advisers have also helped by carrying out a 'health check' to support you in focusing sharply on how to bring about the improvements that are needed.

External advice has also come from a nearby multi-academy trust. Advisers have provided help in acquiring funding from the Department for Education to support improvements. They have set up links with other providers locally to enable staff to see strong practice. They are currently working on developing the use of technology to make learning more engaging for pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Bury. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector