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Mrs Claire Robbins
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Dear Mrs Robbins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Royds School

Following my visit to your school on 16 December 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 last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- Better inform, support and challenge the families of pupils who do not attend school well enough. Poor attendance is undermining the school's efforts to raise standards.
- Quicken actions to increase the uptake of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). In particular, improve pupils' experience of studying a modern foreign language at key stage 3 so that more pupils continue studying a language at GCSE level.
- Improve the standard of discussion in lessons by ensuring that teachers demand more developed verbal responses from pupils to their questions.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the chair and four other members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plans were evaluated. Meetings were also held with a group of curriculum leaders and a group of pupils from key stages 3 and 4. Visits were made to lessons in mathematics, history and science. A range of documents were considered, including the school's vetting checks on adults who work in the school, curriculum plans and behaviour and attendance information.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new chair of the governing body has been appointed. A deputy headteacher took up post in June 2019. Four curriculum leaders have left the school and some new curriculum leaders have been recruited. Several teachers have also left the school. Following a consultation, school leaders have taken the decision to close the sixth form. Currently, there are no students in Year 12. There are 15 students remaining in Year 13. Their study programmes will continue to be delivered in partnership with Brigshaw and Temple Moor Schools through to completion next summer.

Main findings

The headteacher is honest and realistic about the school's performance. These qualities, coupled with a strong sense of moral purpose, are appreciated by the school's staff, parents and carers. Together with the deputy headteacher, she has generated a sense of momentum. Progress is being made with most of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection.

Senior leaders are taking a 'back to basics' approach. They have focused on systematically reviewing and developing the school's curriculum. This term, curriculum leaders have worked together to review and rewrite curriculum plans. They have ensured that the knowledge they plan to teach matches the content set out in the national curriculum. They have carefully considered the sequence in which this knowledge will be taught. More thought has gone into how the teaching and learning of topics should be implemented in the classroom. The school's model of 'Teach – Demonstrate – Assess – Respond' has brought more structure to the way in which teachers organise learning. Pupils recognise that they are being taught more demanding content this year. Teachers are also ensuring that the content covered is regularly revisited and recapped. There are signs that this approach is helping pupils to retain more knowledge. Leaders know the curriculum was not implemented well enough in the past and that some older pupils have considerable gaps in their knowledge. As a result, teachers are providing plenty of additional revision and recap lessons after school to help these pupils address gaps in their

knowledge. In the lessons visited during this inspection, some teachers challenged pupils to give well-reasoned answers to their questions. However, others did not and were too ready to accept poor answers or to simply answer their own questions. This does not help pupils to develop their grasp of important knowledge.

Leaders' actions have strengthened the quality of curriculum planning within subjects. However, as a whole, the curriculum is not ambitious enough. Published performance data shows that, on average, the school's pupils attained broadly average standards at the end of primary school. However, very few pupils go on to follow the EBacc. In 2019, only 2% of Year 11 pupils had studied this academically demanding combination of subjects. There are few pupils in the current Years 9, 10 or 11 who are doing so. For example, in the current Year 11, around 30% of pupils attained highly at primary school but only 8% are studying the EBacc. This is well short of the government's ambition of 75% of pupils studying the EBacc nationally by 2022. Although the school's option system does not prevent pupils from choosing this combination of subjects, in practice, few choose to do so. In part, this is because pupils do not get a good enough experience in some subjects, such as modern foreign languages and history, before they choose their GCSE courses. These weaknesses need to be addressed more urgently.

The last inspection found the quality of subject leadership to be variable. Since then, some curriculum leaders have left the school and some new curriculum leaders have been appointed. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are providing good training and development for them. This training has helped to improve curriculum planning considerably. Good practice in some departments is being systematically shared. Approaches to teaching, such as using visualisers to display examples of effective work, have been identified and rolled out across the school.

The biggest single problem undermining the quality of education in the school is the level of pupils' absence. Leaders have not been able to make any difference to this, despite employing a wide range of strategies. The school has a clear set of rewards for good attendance. Leaders employ the full range of sanctions available to them to challenge poor attendance. Nevertheless, the trend in attendance shows no signs of improvement. Leaders have detailed information about attendance patterns. Attendance in key stage 4 is much worse than in key stage 3. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils lags well behind that of other pupils. This year to date, around one in five pupils has been persistently absent from school. The school's analysis shows that the pupils who attend well make good academic progress. However, many parents continue to condone their child's regular absence from school. Taking holidays in term time and the habit of regularly missing school on a Friday are undermining some pupils' future prospects considerably.

Leaders have been much more successful in reducing the previously high level of exclusion of pupils from the school. The needs of pupils at risk of exclusion are now being met more effectively. The Pathway provision the school has developed is

supporting these pupils better. The curriculum they receive in Pathways, which includes vocational training, is better suited to their interests. Overall, the number of fixed-term exclusions reduced by 63% last year. Far fewer days are being lost to learning. Leaders acknowledge that there is more to do. Almost all exclusions this year have been given to a relatively small, but challenging, group of pupils. During this inspection, pupils were clear that the general standard of behaviour around school has improved. Pupils understand the consequences of poor behaviour. They stated that teachers were managing behaviour more consistently. The school's records and the monitoring done over time by the local authority show that most lessons take place without any interruption.

The last inspection judged the quality of the sixth form to require improvement. Since then, the headteacher and governors have taken the pragmatic decision to close the sixth form. Standards were not good enough and the sixth form had become a financial drain on the school. The last cohort of Year 13 students is being supported to complete their study programmes. Much of their study time is taking place at the sixth form's partner schools. Leaders have consulted closely with the parents of these students to make sure that their study programmes continue to meet their needs.

External support

The local authority is providing the school with an enhanced level of support. A local authority adviser visits the school frequently to check on the effect of leaders' actions. This is helping school leaders to reflect upon and refine their decisions.

The local authority adviser is also providing effective training for curriculum leaders.

The school continues to draw upon support from the Red Kite Alliance of secondary schools in Yorkshire.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector