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Richard Hanson
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Dear Mr Hanson

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Queensbury Academy

Following my visit to your school on 8 January 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in June 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2019

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and hence improve pupils' outcomes, by:
 - ensuring that teachers are held to account for pupils' progress and outcomes
 - providing the support, professional development and challenge required so that teaching across all year groups becomes good or better
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations so that all pupils are challenged, produce high-quality work and make the progress of which they are capable
 - ensuring that teachers consistently apply the school's policy for providing pupils with the guidance they need to improve their work
 - embedding strategies to support the progress of those pupils who are disadvantaged and those pupils with SEND, so they make the progress required to catch up with those who have similar starting points.
- Improve the quality of personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
 - improving the attendance of all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged
 - reducing the proportion of pupils who are regularly late or absent from school
 - eliminating the low-level disruption that sometimes occurs in lessons
 - reducing the levels of fixed-term exclusion.
- Further improve the quality of leadership and management, by continuing to develop:
 - systems and procedures that will allow leaders to establish an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses of the school and to inform their next actions
 - leadership at all levels so that the skills and passion for success that exist in leaders and governors are used to their fullest extent.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 8 January 2020

Evidence

I met the vice principal and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Feversham Education Trust. I also met a range of senior leaders and subject leaders. I observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documents. I talked to groups of pupils in meetings and in lessons. I talked to the trust school improvement officer. I also held a telephone conversation with an external consultant commissioned to evaluate the school's improvement journey. I explored behaviour with pupils and staff. I also considered information on attendance. I met a member of the governing body and discussed the recent review of governance.

Context

Since the previous inspection, eight members of staff have left the school and ten have joined. In June 2019, directors of learning were appointed in English, modern foreign languages and information technology. In September 2019, new heads of department were appointed in physical education (PE) and geography.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Leaders have increased teachers' accountability for the quality of education. They have introduced new quality assurance processes. Subject leaders have received time and training to build their expertise. They regularly review planning, teaching and the quality of work. Subject leaders use these ongoing checks to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Many subject leaders are developing their leadership abilities on accredited training programmes. Although these processes are relatively new, subject leaders are now more aware of standards in their departments.

Senior leaders have also introduced a more formal professional development programme. As part of this, they are raising teachers' expectations of the quality of work expected from pupils. Leaders have introduced common strategies to build greater ambition and challenge into the curriculum. While there is still a long way to go, leaders are beginning to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve.

In recent years, pupils in Year 11 have made much weaker progress than other pupils nationally. Although progress showed a marginal improvement in 2019, it remained weak. Leaders are striving to balance long-term improvement with more urgent action to support current Year 11 pupils. The trust is commissioning external support to provide extra tuition for pupils. When areas of underachievement are identified, more prompt action is being taken to provide support.

Senior leaders are beginning to work with subject leaders to improve the

curriculum. Subject leaders in mathematics have been working with local experts to develop the key stage 3 curriculum. Science leaders have also reviewed the curriculum. Similar developments are taking place in English and the humanities. These developments are at a very early stage. Subject leaders still require support to plan and develop an ambitious curriculum.

In discussion, Year 10 and 11 pupils said standards of behaviour had transformed over the past two years. Staffing has become more stable leading to more secure relationships between pupils and staff. Year 7 pupils said they felt welcome and safe on arrival to the school. A strong staff presence has helped to create an increasing sense of order around the school site. There has been a decline in incidents of pupils being removed from lessons for poor behaviour. However, recent actions have tempered some of these positive developments. In November 2019, leaders sought to further increase standards of behaviour. As part of this, they implemented the behaviour policy with renewed firmness. This has led to a marked increase in the use of fixed-term exclusions and days lost to exclusion for poor behaviour.

Leaders' actions to improve attendance have shown some signs of success. They have built a stronger attendance team. This team monitors attendance thoroughly. The team works closely with families to support pupils with attendance problems. They provide a minibus service for the most vulnerable pupils. Members of the attendance team also make regular home visits. These actions have secured marked improvements for pupils with previously low attendance. Leaders have also secured a slight improvement in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. In addition, leaders have seen an increase in the percentage of pupils securing 100% attendance. While overall absence remains too high, leaders' strategies are securing some improvements.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Senior leaders have introduced stronger systems to check the quality of education. They have worked with staff to establish a more open and accountable structure. In addition, they have worked with other academies to introduce new systems to check the progress pupils make over time. Senior leaders have trained subject leaders to use these new approaches. As a result, leaders at all levels have a better picture of the quality of education.

Leaders recognise that the curriculum needs to be strengthened. They realise that pupils were not developing sufficient knowledge and skills at key stage 3. This meant they were not prepared for the work ahead at key stage 4. The vice principal is working with subject leaders to review their curriculum plans. In some subjects, such as mathematics, this work is being enhanced by shared planning with local experts. In other subjects, this shared planning is less developed. Leaders realise the importance of this curriculum work and that much work needs to be carried out in the months ahead.

Leaders are beginning to raise expectations of the work expected from pupils. In their planning, teachers set tasks that encourage pupils to work with increasing challenge. There remains much variability in how well these approaches are being implemented. This challenge is not consistently seen in the curriculum that pupils experience.

Leaders have raised the profile of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders carry out focused lesson visits. The new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has worked with trust leaders to raise awareness. Staff are receiving clearer information on how to help pupils with SEND. The SENCo has provided training sessions to help staff support pupils with visual and hearing impairments. Pupils' support plans are being reviewed. While much needs to be done, staff are becoming more mindful of their responsibilities for pupils with SEND.

Leaders are keen to seek external support and scrutiny. They have commissioned an experienced educational consultant to review their improvement actions at regular intervals. They recently commissioned a local leader of education to review the use of pupil premium funding. They are currently using recommendations from this report to improve curriculum support for disadvantaged pupils.

The school has recently completed a review of governance. This review praises the skills of the relatively new governing body. It recognises that governors have the ability to hold leaders to account. However, the review also points out that governors need to align their own improvement plans more closely to the school's plans. Queensbury Academy is in a more vulnerable situation than other schools in the trust. Leaders will very much need the heightened support and challenge of governors in the months ahead.

Leaders are developing better links with parents and carers. The CEO and principal addressed a meeting of over 100 parents following June's inspection. They have also set up regular drop-in sessions where parents can discuss any concerns. These relationships will be crucial in supporting the school's future success.

The trust has recently made the decision to base important trust staff at Queensbury Academy. This includes the CEO and trust improvement officers. This is an important step that recognises the school needs additional capacity on site to support ongoing improvement.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Senior leaders have introduced stronger systems to check the quality of education. Middle leaders and their teams are more accountable for the quality of education.
- Pupils' behaviour is improving. In discussion, pupils said that their learning is less

disrupted by poor behaviour.

- Staffing is becoming more stable. Leaders are spending much less money on temporary teachers. This is also improving teaching and behaviour.
- Leaders are beginning to secure improvements in attendance.
- Leaders are inviting external scrutiny from school leaders and consultants to support the improvement journey.
- Leaders are providing better staff training. Departments have more time to use training to improve the quality of education in their subjects.
- Leaders are making staff more aware of the needs of pupils with SEND.
- Teachers are beginning to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve in the curriculum.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Despite improvements in behaviour, incidents of fixed-term exclusion remain far too high.
- Despite better training and support, the quality of teaching remains highly variable.
- Governors have not fully aligned their improvement plans with those of the school. This is important given the increased support and challenge leaders will need in the months ahead.
- Although staffing is more stable, recruitment of staff in some subjects remains a challenge.
- In some subjects, leaders are not receiving external expertise to help them to develop a high-quality curriculum in their subjects.
- Leaders' actions to develop the curriculum are at a very early stage of development.

External support

Subject leaders have worked with a number of local schools to develop the curriculum. The mathematics department have worked closely with Trinity Academy and The White Rose Maths Hub on the key stage 3 curriculum. The humanities and English departments have worked with Rastrick High School and other local schools to build expertise. PE and health and social care teachers have worked with local schools to moderate the standard of pupils' work.

Senior leaders have worked with an educational consultant to gain external views on the school's improvement journey. The trust has also brokered leadership support and guidance for senior leaders. The school has received support from the

Star Academies Trust with the installation of new systems to monitor progress and the quality of education.