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Neil Rodgers
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Dear Mr Rodgers

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to James Calvert Spence College

Following my visit to your school on 20 January 2020, 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 not 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:

- accelerate actions to improve the quality of education at key stage 2.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, your senior leadership team and subject directors and leaders. I met your primary improvement leader to discuss actions to improve the curriculum and the quality of teaching. We visited lessons in Years 5 and 6. I also met leaders overseeing improvements to teaching and the curriculum at key stages 3 and 4. I met with groups of pupils to discuss any changes they had identified since the last

inspection. I met the school improvement partner. I met three members of the governing body, including the chair. I looked at improvement plans and external valuations of the quality of the school's work. I also looked at a small sample of work in pupils' books. I visited lessons in mathematics with the subject director.

Context

Since the previous inspection, two assistant headteachers have joined the senior leadership team. You have also appointed a primary improvement leader.

There have been changes to the governing body, including the appointment of a new chair of governors.

From September 2019, Year 7 pupils are now taught on the Acklington Road site. The South Avenue site is now for the sole use of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils.

Main findings

Since the school's previous inspection in October 2018, you and your team have secured improvements in the quality of education at key stages 4 and 5. Your actions in this area are building increasing momentum. However, actions to improve the curriculum and the quality of teaching at key stage 2 have not been effective. This is the area that still requires marked improvement for the school to offer a good quality of education.

Your efforts to improve the curriculum at key stage 2 have been undermined by staffing instability. You lost important leaders at crucial times. As a result, weaknesses in the curriculum and the quality of teaching were not addressed. This contributed to pupils achieving very weak outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in 2019. Pupils made weak progress in all areas, with only 27% achieving the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics combined. Over half of pupils did not reach expected standards in reading. This underperformance over the past three years is not improving sufficiently. As a result, too many pupils lack the reading abilities, and the wider knowledge and skills, to prepare them for the curriculum at key stage 3.

You and your team are now taking more concerted action. You have appointed a primary improvement leader. From September 2019, she has made adjustments to the curriculum. She is bringing in more focused training. New initiatives are being introduced to support pupils' reading. In addition, actions are being taken to raise expectations of pupils' writing. Teachers are also developing new approaches to mathematics. She is also reviewing aspects of the wider curriculum. These actions are creating a much stronger foundation for improvement. However, much remains to be done to reduce gaps in pupils' learning and to improve standards of reading.

Your actions for pupils in key stage 4 and key stage 5 have been more successful. Your teaching and learning team are developing new approaches to learning. Many of these approaches are designed to help pupils to remember important knowledge over time. The team has developed a coherent professional development programme for staff. In subjects such as science and mathematics, teachers are developing their expertise through partnerships with consultants and other schools. While effective teaching in school is still not shared sufficiently, there are more opportunities for teachers to develop their expertise. Leaders are also introducing more effective ways to check the quality of education in the different subject areas.

These actions contributed to improving outcomes for pupils at the end of Year 11 in 2019. The proportion of pupils achieving grade 5 and above in English and mathematics increased by over 10%. In both English and mathematics, the proportions of pupils achieving higher grades also showed improvement, reflecting greater challenge in the curriculum. While progress for disadvantaged pupils dipped, overall progress was in line with that seen nationally. Pupils continued to make strong progress in science. Leaders and teachers also secured better outcomes for students in the sixth form. Achievement in academic subjects and vocational subjects showed marked improvement.

Subject directors have developed the curriculum. They have planned what pupils will learn and remember over time. In English and mathematics, leaders shared examples of considered curriculum plans. Your science leader is also working with local networks to further enhance the curriculum. The work to align the key stage 2 curriculum with key stage 3 across subjects is less developed.

Your team is in the process of introducing new approaches to improve pupils' reading. They have arranged staff training on phonics to enable staff to help pupils to read better. They are introducing formal programmes to develop pupils' language skills. In addition, they are working with parents and carers to help them to support their children. This work is at an early stage of development. Much needs to be done to address the gaps in pupils' knowledge from key stage 2, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. The new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is working with pupils and parents to provide more effective support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Your team are also striving to build the wider curriculum by raising pupils' aspirations. They recognise that many of their pupils live in a relatively isolated coastal environment. They are striving to build stronger links with employers and higher education. The school recently hosted an event with local employers working alongside pupils. They explored how these links can make the curriculum more relevant and exciting. In 2019, increasing proportions of students went on to university.

Your governing body knows the school's strengths and areas for continued improvement. Governors are aware of the historical weaknesses in the curriculum

and pupils' achievement at key stage 2. With their past experience in education and children's services, they have the innate skills and knowledge to hold leaders to account. They are reviewing progress more regularly, particularly for pupils in key stage 2. This support and challenge will be very important to ensure that effective action is taken to accelerate the pace of improvement at key stage 2.

External support

You have worked with your school improvement partner to secure additional insights into your improvement journey. You continue to work with improvement partners from North Tyneside local authority to strengthen leadership and subject expertise. A number of subject leaders have worked with other schools to develop the curriculum and subject expertise. In mathematics, teachers have worked with consultants to develop the curriculum and approaches to teaching. In English, teachers have worked with consultants on new approaches to reading. Several leaders have, and are, undertaking accredited leadership courses.

The school has recently submitted plans to be part of the 'ONE Vision' programme. As part of this programme, the school will receive additional support from high-performing schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector