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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs L Moore
Principal
Wodensborough Ormiston Academy
Hydes Road
Wednesbury
West Midlands
WS10 0DR

Dear Mrs Moore

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wodensborough Ormiston Academy

Following my visit to your school on 30 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and the trust 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:

- Reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent. Leaders have put in place systems and rewards such as day trips as an incentive for pupils to achieve 100% attendance. This is starting to improve pupils' attendance. However, despite significant improvement, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is still too high
- Ensure that the curriculum is sufficiently ambitious to address the needs of all pupils and that the curriculum in each subject reflects the school's core values of Believe, Achieve, Succeed. The curriculum has been reviewed to ensure that there is sufficient coverage of the national curriculum and that pupils' learning is well sequenced. Leaders are working closely with feeder primary schools to look

at the curriculum in more detail and to establish pupils' starting points when they join the school in Year 7.

- Ensure that teachers have access to better quality classroom technology to support further improvements to teaching. Leaders have ensured that the quality of teaching has improved and is now more consistent. However, teachers do not have access to the technology in the classroom that would enhance their teaching and provide access to high-quality resources online.
- Ensure that pupils receive the support they need to improve their handwriting, presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils are proud of their school and most now try really hard to produce their best work. There are now clear expectations of presentation, grammar, punctuation and spelling across the curriculum. However, some pupils' work is still too often poorly presented. These pupils need more support to improve their handwriting and present their work to its best advantage. Teachers need to consistently remind pupils of leaders' expectations for presentation.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the vice-principal and the regional director of Ormiston Academy Trust (OAT) to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

Two learning walks took place with you and the vice-principal. I met with a group of teachers, including middle leaders, teachers and newly qualified teachers.

I talked to pupils at breaktime and met with a group of pupils. I spoke to pupils in lessons about their learning.

I held a meeting about attendance, exclusions, safeguarding and support with:

- the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), who is also an assistant principal
- the assistant principal for behaviour, interventions and inclusion
- the school's attendance and admissions manager
- a representative of the exclusion service for Sandwell local authority
- the chair of the local fair access panel
- a specialist adviser for social and emotional mental health (SEMH).

I reviewed a number of documents, including minutes of the OAT strategic performance board and the local academy committee (LAC), the school's self-evaluation document, the outcomes of monitoring activities, and attendance and exclusions information.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of changes in staff. Following a review of leadership roles, you appointed an assistant principal for behaviour, intervention and inclusion and an admissions and attendance manager. Several new teachers have also been appointed. Leadership of a number of subjects, including mathematics and humanities, has been strengthened.

Main findings

You set high expectations in terms of behaviour and teaching. You are respected by staff and pupils alike, who recognise your hard work and commitment to do the best for all pupils. You are determined that the school supports all pupils, regardless of their needs or challenges. Your commitment and determination for improvement are now shared more widely across the school. Staff are now on board with your vision. You have tackled underperformance and ensured that any new staff appointed to the school share your commitment. Together with other leaders, you have addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection effectively.

The quality of teaching is now more consistently effective. This is because the training and support teachers receive are more specifically focused on subject teaching, rather than generic teaching. Teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge. They understand and use the most effective teaching strategies that will make a difference in their subject. However, teachers do not have access to up-to-date classroom resources that can enhance teaching and learning. In some classrooms, the projection facilities are poor. Pupils struggle to read from tired, old whiteboards. This can have a negative impact on pupils' understanding.

Pupils recognise that the quality of teaching has improved and say that they now feel much more confident in their learning. They feel they are making strong progress in most areas. In lessons, they have regular 'do it now' activities to make sure they can remember and recall easily what they have learned before. Work in pupils' books shows that, in many cases, the curriculum is well planned to support pupils' learning. Many pupils can now confidently explain and apply what they have learned. However, in some cases, pupils' handwriting and presentation let their work down. Despite clear expectations for presentation, teachers do not always ensure that pupils present their work in the best possible way. Some pupils need more support to improve their handwriting so that they can more confidently demonstrate what they know.

As a result of support and training for leadership development, subject leaders are now driving forward improvements in their departments with more confidence. For example, senior leaders have established clear expectations for all teachers in terms of assessment and feedback to pupils, focusing on sharing success criteria with pupils and supporting them to evaluate how successfully they have achieved them. However, each department is free to put this into practice in a way that is

meaningful for their subject. Subject leaders and teachers value the professional dialogue they now have to shape the learning in their subject.

In each subject, leaders have carried out an audit to ensure that the curriculum is properly sequenced and has sufficient coverage of the key knowledge and skills pupils need to learn. They are working closely with local primary schools to ensure that teachers have a better understanding of pupils' starting points when they join the school in Year 7. Leaders are continuing to review and revise the curriculum to ensure that it is sufficiently ambitious and that it reflects the school's vision for all pupils to achieve success, regardless of their starting points.

Expectations of what pupils can achieve are now much higher. The school's vision is 'Believe, Achieve, Succeed'. Staff and pupils embody this vision. Pupils are well behaved and polite. Many have excellent attitudes to learning because they trust the teachers to help them do the best they possibly can. Pupils have higher expectations of themselves, academically and personally. The clear sanctions and rewards in the revised behaviour policy are transparent to all pupils and are now consistently applied by all staff. Pupils and staff say that behaviour has improved dramatically since the last inspection and that there is little or no bullying now. Pupils say that consequences are taken seriously now, which deters them from getting into trouble again. As a result, fixed-term exclusions have reduced and fewer pupils have multiple exclusions.

Those pupils who have struggled in the past to focus on learning are now making stronger progress as a result of the support they receive. Leaders have introduced an alternative programme for pupils who need extra support to focus on learning. Pupils say this has helped them re-join their classmates successfully and they are now ready to learn. The school has opened a small sixth form for those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who wish to continue their studies in a familiar environment.

Attendance is improving. As a result of the improvements to teaching, the management of behaviour and higher expectations, pupils now want to be in school. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has improved considerably but is still too high. Leaders acknowledge that even more needs to be done to improve attendance for those who are absent too often.

Pupils appreciate the many opportunities they have to learn outside lessons, such as 'session 6' catch-up lessons and trips that bring learning to life. Pupils have visited Oxford University to find out about student life there, including taking part in a debate. Some pupils are applying to attend the summer school there. Other pupils have visited Birmingham University to find out about studying medicine. Pupils have high aspirations for their future careers and say that the careers advice they receive helps them to find out which careers would suit them best. They actively look for work experience in their chosen careers.

This is a truly inclusive school. A great deal of hard work has gone into making the school the welcoming, supportive place it is today. Leaders ensure that pupils feel safe and are safe. Pupils receive counselling when they need it. Pupils say that teachers go the extra mile and are very committed to their well-being.

Despite the comprehensive support being provided and the improvements to teaching and behaviour, GCSE outcomes for pupils in 2019 were disappointing. Leaders explained the particular circumstances around these outcomes. They are working hard to ensure that a higher proportion of current pupils are on track to achieve good GCSEs in 2020.

External support

Staff receive comprehensive support from their colleagues to improve their practice, as well as from other schools in the trust. Teachers have visited a number of other schools to see good practice. Subject leaders benefit from subject experts who work across OAT. Subject reviews have taken place in English and mathematics. Science and other subjects will be reviewed shortly. These reviews provide leaders and governors with an external view of the quality of education and help subject leaders to put in place specific actions to improve teaching and learning in their subject further.

The school works very closely with external partners, particularly local authority services such as admissions, exclusions and special needs support. Leaders make good use of any support that will benefit pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Sandwell. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Spilsbury
Her Majesty's Inspector