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Mr Scott Burnside
Chaucer School
Wordsworth Avenue
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Dear Mr Burnside

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Chaucer School

Following my visit to your school on 13 February 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 was judged to require improvement at its previous section 5 inspection on 20-21 November 2018.

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:

- further refine curriculum plans for all subjects to show explicitly how knowledge and skills build up over time, from Year 7 through to Year 11
- further develop curriculum plans to highlight clearly how knowledge is connected between different subjects, where appropriate, so that pupils can draw from a wider prior knowledge base when they are learning something new
- ensure that the analysis of attendance and behaviour allows leaders to evaluate the impact of their numerous actions more effectively.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leaders, various subject leaders and a range of staff. I also met with a group of governors and trustees, including the chair and vice-chair of the local governing board and the chair of the Tapton School Academy Trust. I discussed the support and actions taken since the last inspection with the chief executive officer of the trust. I scrutinised school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation document and improvement plans. I conducted short visits to lessons with two of your assistant headteachers. A sample of pupils' work from those lessons was reviewed alongside senior leaders. I also met with a group of pupils from Years 8, 10 and 11 to discuss their work. I spoke to a number of pupils informally about their views on developments since the last inspection.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been a small number of changes in staffing. A new subject leader for English was appointed in December 2019 to cover a maternity leave. The structure of middle leadership has been reviewed and two teachers have been promoted internally to lead the newly created faculties of Discovery (modern foreign languages, history, geography and religious education) and Create (art, music, drama and design technology). The school has recruited three additional governors.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, you have reviewed all areas of the school, identifying and prioritising areas for improvement. Leaders have taken a range of appropriate actions to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. You acted to eradicate weak teaching and leadership. You reinforced your high expectations across the whole school. You reviewed the school's staffing structure, including middle and senior leadership and, supported by the trust, you managed staffing changes effectively. You appointed experienced staff in some key areas of responsibility, including the appointment of a new and experienced subject leader in the English department to cover a maternity leave. You promoted internally two members of staff to lead two new faculties so that best practice is shared widely across a number of subject areas. As a result, leadership and management have been strengthened further and the rate of school improvement is accelerating.

Following the last inspection, you have raised expectations of senior leaders further. You have reviewed the systems and procedures senior leaders use to monitor all areas of the school's performance and have ensured that these expectations are clear and understood by staff at all levels. Senior leaders work hard to analyse school performance information regularly. However, they do not evaluate clearly the impact of their numerous actions, especially around behaviour and attendance.

Since the last inspection and with support from the trust, you reviewed the school's curriculum. The curriculum plans cover the national curriculum and are carefully thought out. The school's 'LIFE' programme of personal development has been strengthened further and is woven throughout the curriculum. Staff receive appropriate professional development to support them in delivering the ambitious curriculum. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is improving. Leaders have considered carefully how content is taught in each subject area. However, it is not explicitly clear in some curriculum plans how knowledge and skills build up over time as pupils progress through each school year. You acknowledge that this area needs more refinement.

Assessment is used well in most subjects to identify what pupils know and remember over time. You have ensured that teachers follow the school's assessment policy consistently across different subject areas. You and your leaders monitor this area regularly and support staff who do not apply the policy consistently. During the inspection, pupils could articulate well how previous knowledge in a subject helped them to learn something new. For example, in mathematics, pupils in Year 8 could describe with confidence how their knowledge of factorising simple equations from November helped them learn how to factorise more complex quadratic equations now. However, the content of different subjects is not clearly linked so that pupils can draw upon wider prior knowledge when learning something new. You agreed with me that this area is at an early stage of development.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance. You raised expectations around behaviour. You and your leaders reviewed the school's behaviour policy with a focus on positive discipline. You have established a strong culture of inclusion and developed a curriculum to support all pupils, including vulnerable pupils. As a result, pupils report that behaviour has improved since the last inspection.

You and your leaders have identified a cohort of pupils who struggle to meet the school's raised expectations. Fixed-term exclusions increased following the renewed focus on behaviour. You and your staff recognised an increasing challenge in the local area because of an upsurge of activity from organised crime groups. As a result, leaders are working closely with external agencies, including the Violence Reduction Unit and the Police Crime Commissioner. Through focused intervention programmes, you have managed to reduce the fixed-term exclusions and improve the behaviour of a targeted group of pupils. The number of permanent exclusions has reduced since the last inspection. Low-level disruption in lessons has significantly improved and pupils now regularly talk about 'behaviour for learning' and 'behaviour for success'. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know how to stay safe, including online.

Improving the attendance of pupils remains a high priority for school leaders, governors and the trust. The school's attendance team, further strengthened by the

appointment of an 'enhanced welfare leader', monitor absences regularly and provides support to pupils who need it. You have strengthened your support to pupils who are regularly absent from school by working closely with a range of professionals, including educational psychologists, mental health practitioners and mentors. As a result, overall attendance improved last year but remains below the national average.

Governors and trustees know the school very well. The local governing board monitors the implementation of the school's improvement plan closely and provides strong challenge and support to leaders. Governors have a wide range of knowledge and expertise. Three additional governors have recently been appointed to the local governing board. As a result, governance has been strengthened further.

The trust has a clear vision for the continuous improvement of the school and provides effective support to staff at all levels. Trust subject directors for English, mathematics and science work closely with school subject leaders to increase capacity for further improvement. As a result, middle leaders are more confident in monitoring pupils' outcomes in their subjects, holding teachers to account and driving further developments.

External support

The school receives no external support at this point in time. All the support is provided by Tipton School Academy Trust.

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

Yours sincerely

Dimitris Spiliotis

Her Majesty's Inspector