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Dear Miss Bailey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oakfield Lodge School

Following my visit to your school on 20 May 2021, 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(2) 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- identify the important knowledge that pupils are expected to know in all subjects and decide the order in which it should be taught
- ensure that curriculum plans are adapted appropriately for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- ensure that leaders receive additional training and support to plan the curriculum in those subjects that remain underdeveloped
- ensure that leaders hold teachers more fully to account for the implementation of the improved curriculum plans.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the school has moved into a new purpose-built building on the same site as the previous temporary building. During this time, there have been several changes to the staffing structure, including at leadership level. A new chair of the management committee has also been appointed.

Main findings

You are tackling the areas for improvement that were identified at the previous inspection with increasing success. Your improvement plans are clear. They set out precisely the steps that leaders are taking to ensure that pupils receive the quality of education that they need to succeed in their 'forever school'. Governors have evaluated the effectiveness of their work. They provide greater challenge to leaders. They now check on the effectiveness of your actions to improve the quality of education that pupils receive. While the pace of improvement has picked up more recently, some important improvement work has been delayed due to the impact of the pandemic. This is especially the case for curriculum planning in some subjects.

Since the previous inspection, you and other leaders have successfully broadened the curriculum that pupils experience. Pupils have access to more subjects. For example, pupils study for exam qualifications in new GCSE subjects, such as history. This broader range of opportunities is widening pupils' choices for their future career paths. Pupils also benefit from better advice and guidance, which help them to make suitable subject or activity choices to meet their aspirations.

Despite leaders' actions to broaden the subjects that pupils learn, leaders' curriculum planning documents in some subjects remain underdeveloped. The differences in the quality of education that pupils receive across some subjects are visible. This is because of some unevenness in leaders' understanding of how to plan an effective subject curriculum. Some leaders also lack confidence in holding staff to account for the implementation of curriculum plans. More staff training is planned to develop further some leaders' understanding of their role.

Where subjects are well developed, for example in mathematics, leaders' curriculum plans successfully keep pupils on track with their learning. However, in some other subjects, such as writing and science, leaders' plans are not precise. They do not set out the steps of learning that pupils need. Leaders' curriculum plans are often not adapted as well as they should be for pupils with SEND. As a result, some pupils, including those with SEND, do not remember as much as they should.

Despite this, leaders have successfully ensured that most pupils are able to read accurately and fluently. Pupils said that they enjoy reading. The reading curriculum enables them to access learning increasingly well in other subject areas. Staff provide the right support for pupils who are still at the early stages of reading.

Leaders now provide more opportunities for pupils' wider development. For example, pupils told me that they have learned many new things since they began at Oakfield Lodge School. They benefit from learning how to cook. They enjoy more physical activity and the chance to keep fit in the local sports centre. Pupils demonstrate increasing tolerance and understanding of each other's differences.

Since the previous inspection, you have taken appropriate action to ensure that pupils have a more positive attitude to learning across the school. You are also continuing to improve pupils' rates of attendance. For example, some pupils who have worked off site with tutors now feel more confident to attend school on site.

Additional support

Leaders and governors have made effective use of the support available to strengthen senior leadership. They have worked closely with the local authority and a local multi-academy trust. Leaders have also consulted with colleagues from other mainstream schools and pupil referral units to broaden the curriculum offer.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders; pupils; staff; representatives of the management committee, including the chair of governors; a representative of the local authority; and representatives from a local multi-academy trust to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection.

I considered the documentation provided. I scrutinised curriculum plans. I reviewed minutes of the meetings of the management committee. I also looked at samples of pupils' work. There were insufficient responses recorded on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to analyse. I considered the 11 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire East local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Cropper
Her Majesty's Inspector