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20 July 2021

Simon Robertson  
Executive Headteacher  
Aylestone School  
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Herefordshire  
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Dear Mr Robertson

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Aylestone School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 July 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.**

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that all assessment information that leaders collect is meaningful and useful in helping pupils to know and remember the curriculum.

## **Context**

Since the last section 5 inspection, there has been a restructuring of senior leadership in the school and across the federation of which the school is a member. The deputy executive headteacher is now based at Aylestone whereas previously he had been leading at the primary schools in the federation. Other senior leadership roles have also been adjusted.

The school has more pupils than when it was last inspected. It is now at capacity in almost all years.

Leaders believe that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on some pupils' learning habits. Pupils have become less active in their learning. Leaders have included addressing this issue in the school development plan.

## **Main findings**

Leaders know the school well. They understand its strengths and those areas where further work is needed. Development plans are clear and concise and are well focused on a small number of key priorities. Leaders have successfully addressed many of the areas for improvement identified in the previous section 5 inspection in January 2018. They have made effective use of support from other schools.

The school's curriculum provides pupils with a suitably broad range of subjects and enough time to study each in sufficient depth. In the past, pupils did not spend enough time studying languages in key stage 3 to cover the planned curriculum in sufficient depth and their progress was poor. Now, pupils study French for three hours each week in Years 7, 8 and 9. It is a popular subject at GCSE and pupils are learning well.

Expectations are high. For example, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) study the same curriculum as other pupils. Teachers adapt their teaching and/or the curriculum, and staff provide extra support when pupils need it. Parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online inspection questionnaire, praised the support that the school provides for pupils with SEND.

Leaders place an appropriate emphasis on the importance of reading. All pupils are encouraged to read regularly. Pupils who find reading difficult are supported well by staff.

Curriculum leaders have put together detailed curriculum plans for their subjects. These set out what pupils are expected to know and remember after they have been taught a topic. Learning builds from year to year, and key knowledge is revisited regularly. Teachers use quizzes, questions and home learning to check that pupils understand new subject content. They encourage pupils to recall previously

taught material to check they can remember it. These aspects of assessment are effective across subjects.

Leaders collect assessment information from teachers two or three times each year. They currently ask teachers to provide GCSE grades for pupils in all years. However, GCSE grades are intended to be awarded following GCSE assessments, when pupils have finished studying a GCSE course. Consequently, a GCSE grade assigned in Year 7 does not provide meaningful information. The use of GCSE grades when assessing pupils in key stage 3 does not provide any benefit for pupils and risks an over-emphasis on examinations rather than learning and remembering key subject content.

Pupils spoke to me very positively about the support and remote education the school provided for them during the most recent period when schools were only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions. Several parents who responded to Parent View also praised the school's recent work to support and educate their children while they were studying at home.

The attendance of some pupils was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. Attendance, including that of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, has improved since that time. Almost all pupils attend school regularly. Pupils told me that they enjoy school and they are glad to be back attending school in person rather than virtually. Leaders are working hard to support a very small number of pupils who struggle to attend school regularly.

Leaders have addressed the weaknesses in careers education identified at the last inspection. The school now has a comprehensive careers education programme in all years. For example, pupils in Year 7 are soon to take part in a virtual careers fair. Pupils in Year 10 told me that they have been given effective careers advice. Most have a good idea about where they will study when they leave the school.

The school is calm and orderly throughout the day. In lessons, most pupils are keen and eager to learn. At social times, pupils are courteous and polite. Pupils with whom I spoke, parents through Parent View, and staff through their inspection questionnaire all confirmed this positive view of behaviour in the school.

### **Additional support**

Leaders have sourced external support from a number of schools, locally and further afield. They have sought to take good practice from other schools and apply it to Aylestone School. Leaders believe that this strategy has proved successful in improving the curriculum in several subjects.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, curriculum leaders and six governors to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also spoke with a representative of the local authority and two headteachers who are currently supporting the school.

I examined the school's single central record of background checks that leaders make on staff's suitability to work with children prior to employment. I reviewed the school's self-evaluation and development plan. I conducted brief visits to several lessons alongside the executive deputy headteacher. I spoke with pupils during their lunchtime.

I considered the 36 responses from parents to Parent View, including the 20 free-text responses. I also considered the 32 responses from members of staff to their inspection questionnaire.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**