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Nicola Taylor
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Dear Ms Taylor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to High Weald Academy

Following my visit to your school on 1 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 three 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:

- strengthen teachers' subject knowledge and planning so that they adapt their teaching to build effectively on pupils' prior learning
- ensure that low-level disruption is eliminated.

Context

The executive headteacher and three assistant principals have left the school since the last inspection in April 2019. In addition, you have been appointed as the interim chief executive officer of the Brook Learning Trust and there is a new chair of the board of trustees.

Year 11 pupils, having completed their GCSE courses, were no longer attending school at the time of this inspection.

Main findings

Since the last full inspection there has been considerable upheaval at the school. Nonetheless, you and your leaders have worked with determination to bring about improvements. You have made it your mission to establish a calm and orderly environment for the pupils to work within. You have achieved this despite high turnover in teachers and have also managed to sustain some improvements to the curriculum.

The quality of education has been a clear focus for leaders over the past few years. You have ensured that subject leaders have reviewed the content and sequencing of their courses. Leaders have also made sure that teachers are clear about what knowledge is important for pupils to learn and retain. However, you have had to adjust the curriculum since pupils have returned after the partial closure. Teachers have checked what gaps pupils have in their learning and revisit topics where necessary.

Some teachers deliver the curriculum in a way that helps pupils to acquire knowledge well. So, in history, for example, Year 9 pupils are able to recall prior learning about Nazi Germany. They can make links to the new knowledge they are gaining in this topic and use subject-specific vocabulary with confidence and understanding. However, in some other subjects teachers' planning and subject knowledge are not as strong. They do not fully build on pupils' prior learning. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well known by their teachers. This is true also of disadvantaged pupils. However, here too, there is variability in how well teachers adapt their teaching to support these pupils.

You have worked hard to bring about better pupil behaviour. Most pupils now behave well in lessons and at breaktimes. Pupils know that learning is important. Most teachers have high expectations, which pupils meet. However, on occasion pupils do not always pay full attention throughout the lesson. This impedes learning.

You have also tightened further your monitoring of pupils who are persistently absent. You were able to show improvement with some individual pupils' attendance. However, there are still too many pupils who are not attending often enough.

You have revised your careers education and guidance provision to ensure that independent advice is available to pupils. You have supported Year 11 pupils onto the next stage of their education with care. As a result, they all have worthwhile and appropriate destinations for September and online materials to support their transition.

Your academy councillors carry out their duties in a thorough manner. They monitor carefully, and ensure that the actions they identify are carried out. Together, you and the trust have formed an accurate view of the school. Both of you use this view to help set the direction of the school.

Additional support

You have secured the input of two national leaders of education over the past year. They work with you on suggestions for the improvement of the curriculum and its implementation. Leaders have valued this support and put in place actions as a result.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, pupils and staff to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited a range of lessons, accompanied by leaders, and spoke with pupils about their learning. I also met with the chair of trustees of the school. I considered a range of documentation, including your improvement plans and evaluation of the quality of education. I checked the single central record and discussed procedures with the member of staff who maintains it. I took into account the 48 responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including 16 free-texts, and the 15 replies to the staff survey.

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

Yours sincerely

Yasmin Maskatiya
Her Majesty's Inspector