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James Haseldine
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Dear Mr Haseldine

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Dean Trust Wigan

Following my visit with Sue Eastwood, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), Stephen Ruddy, Ofsted Inspector (OI), and Claire Hollister, OI to your school on 6 and 7 July 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in February 2020. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

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

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of The Dean Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wigan. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Emmett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 July 2021

Context

Since the additional monitoring inspection in March 2021, governance and senior leadership in the school have remained stable. One new governor has joined the local governing body. An acting deputy headteacher has been appointed to the senior leadership team on a permanent basis. A faculty leader for technology and a subject leader for personal development have also recently been appointed.

Year 11 pupils were not attending school at the time of this inspection. This group of pupils left the school on 11 June 2021.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Trustees, governors and leaders have taken considerable steps towards overcoming some of the challenges raised in the school's most recent section 5 inspection. Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have appropriate improvement plans that identify those areas that need the most attention. For instance, during the spring and summer terms 2020, trustees and leaders acted to strengthen leadership across the school. This has provided much-needed stability to senior and subject leadership.

Prior to and during the pandemic, subject leaders have worked with the trust to create new curriculum plans. In many subjects, these plans detail the important knowledge that pupils need to learn and when. For example, in science, pupils learn about cells prior to learning about reproduction. However, in some subjects, curriculum plans do not outline the most important knowledge that pupils need to know. A very small number of pupils in key stage 3 do not currently benefit from a broad enough curriculum in English and mathematics. Leaders have appropriate plans in place to rectify this.

Subject leaders' work to implement new curriculum plans varies across subjects. This work is more advanced in some subjects such as science, physical education (PE) and geography. In these subjects, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), learn well. For instance, in PE, pupils develop detailed knowledge of technical language across a range of sports. However, in some subjects, such as English, mathematics, history and modern foreign languages, teachers do not ensure that pupils' knowledge improves over time. For example, in mathematics, pupils do not get the opportunity to combine their knowledge of number facts and methods in more complex activities.

In some subjects, teachers are starting to use assessment well to check what pupils know and remember from the taught curriculum. However, formal assessments

across a range of subjects do not help teachers to identify the missing building blocks in pupils' learning.

Teachers in many subjects use information about pupils with SEND well to help these pupils to access the curriculum. However, this is not consistent in all subjects. Some teachers are not suitably equipped to provide the subject-specific support that pupils with SEND need in order to understand important concepts.

Leaders have taken swift and decisive action to improve the behaviour policy and raise expectations for pupils' conduct. Pupils have a clear understanding of these expectations. Staff have benefited from appropriate support and training to help them to deal with any misbehaviour more consistently than before. Those pupils and staff that inspectors met with said that behaviour, both in and out of lessons, has improved considerably. Pupils appreciate the rewards that they receive for working hard and behaving well. That said, pupils in some classes still have their learning disrupted by the behaviour of others. Furthermore, some pupils' behaviour in corridors and around school remains overly boisterous. Although fixed-term exclusions are reducing, they remain high. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND.

Leaders have taken appropriate steps to strengthen staffing and procedures around attendance. Leaders are beginning to work more closely with the local authority to encourage pupils, including vulnerable pupils, to attend school more regularly. However, this work is in its infancy. Although leaders' work has improved the attendance of a large number of pupils, overall attendance remains low. The proportion of pupils who are frequently absent from school, including disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND, remains too high.

At the time of the section 5 inspection, pupils' use of derogatory language was a cause for concern. Leaders have acted quickly to reduce pupils' use of this language. Pupils and staff told inspectors that the use of inappropriate language around school has reduced considerably. Pupils feel more confident in reporting any issues. Pupils believe that staff will take any incidents seriously and deal with them more effectively than in the past. That said, some pupils raised concerns that some of their peers continue to use unacceptable language at social times and when moving around the school building.

Leaders have created a new curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE). Leaders provided a range of appropriate training to increase teachers' confidence to deliver this curriculum. Pupils have learned more about topics such as respect and the impact that derogatory language has on others. However, this new PSHE curriculum is in its early stages of development. Leaders have detailed plans for pupils to spend more time studying a more coherent and well-organised PSHE curriculum from September 2021.

Pupils benefit from a variety of extra-curricular activities. For instance, they can attend a range of art, sports and science clubs. Leaders also provide pupils with appropriate advice and guidance for the next stages of their education, employment or training. Pupils in Year 11 also continue to benefit from this support.

Following the additional monitoring inspection in March 2021, leaders provided training so that more staff have the skills they need to develop pupils' phonics knowledge. Leaders have appropriate plans in place to ensure that more pupils who need additional help to read fluently and accurately get the support that they need.

Staff are proud to work in the school. They feel that leaders support their well-being and workload carefully. Staff told inspectors that they have a sense of camaraderie. They appreciate the range of training they receive, in particular to help them manage pupils' behaviour more effectively.

Trustees and governors understand their roles well. They maintain a close oversight of leaders' work to improve the school. They hold leaders to account effectively. For example, trustees and governors provide appropriate challenge and support around leaders' work to improve pupils' behaviour and their personal development.

Additional support

The trust has provided governors with support to strengthen their skills in challenging and supporting leaders. Leaders have also accessed support from the trust to develop and improve the PSHE curriculum. Subject leaders value the training that they have received from the trust to develop curriculum plans. Leaders explained to inspectors that they have appreciated working with a local school to strengthen their behaviour policy and procedures.

Evidence

During the inspection, inspectors met with senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers. The lead inspector met with the chair of governors, the chief executive officer of The Dean Trust and a representative of Wigan local authority.

Inspectors met with pupils from Years 7 to 10 to discuss their learning and other aspects of school life. Inspectors visited a number of lessons in English, mathematics, science and PE. Inspectors also reviewed samples of pupils work from a wider range of subjects.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including leaders' improvement plans and attendance and behaviour records. Inspectors analysed subject leaders' curriculum plans across a range of subjects. Inspectors also considered 83 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 55 free-text comments, and 90 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.