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Graham Hill
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Dear Mr Hill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pilton Community College

Following my visit to your school on 8 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 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school 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:

- sharpen planning so that sequences of lessons better enable pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to learn the curriculum
- strengthen the use of assessment so gaps in pupils' knowledge are more rigorously identified, particularly for those with SEND.

Context

At the time of the inspection, a 'bubble' of 20 pupils from Year 9 were isolating.

Trustees have not been able to fill the vacant deputy headteacher position with a suitable candidate. As a result, a leadership restructure has taken place and an English specialist has been seconded to the academy.

Year 11 pupils have now left the academy.

Main findings

You and other leaders have tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection in a systematic and sustained way. With the support of the trust, you have secured knowledgeable leaders in key positions. You have also improved the impact leaders have on provision. For example, performance management is now much more effective. You have done this while maintaining the motivation and commitment of staff. Staff report that they feel valued and you look to prioritise their well-being.

Leaders' plans, including those from the trust, link carefully to improve provision further. You have sensibly focused on ensuring there is better coordination between the work of senior and subject leaders. This has helped to ensure that all departments are focused on curriculum design and delivery. Subject leaders are clear about what they want pupils to learn and when.

Your work on curriculum planning has helped raise expectations. For example, you rightly recognised that your key stage 3 curriculum lacked ambition. You utilised the chance to review what pupils learn in key stage 2 by visiting primary schools within the same trust. From these visits, you raised the expectations of your staff when planning the key stage 3 curriculum. At the same time, you rightly restructured the curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9. As a result, curriculum planning is better organised and increasingly well sequenced. Pupils recognise the curriculum is more interesting than it was in the past.

You are prioritising pupils' literacy to improve their outcomes. Reading is now a core element of the curriculum. You have introduced a tutor reading programme, which allows teachers to read texts not normally accessible to some pupils. The programme has helped promote pupils' love of reading and broaden their vocabulary. Trained teaching assistants deliver phonics sessions to pupils who cannot decode. You rightly recognise this work on literacy is just the beginning. You have sensible plans to develop provision further for pupils whose reading and literacy skills and knowledge are significantly behind where they should be.

Leaders' actions have had the most impact on teaching. Teachers appreciate the 'Learning at Pilton' model you have introduced. This has helped build greater consistency in lessons across departments. For example, pupils recognise the chances they get to build vocabulary and recall prior learning in the subjects they study.

You have rightly identified the need to sharpen how you assess pupils' progress. Teachers' checks on how much of the curriculum pupils remember are underdeveloped.

You have correctly identified the need to improve provision for pupils with SEND across the curriculum. There are pockets of strong practice. For example, the model used in the communication and interaction resource base is effective. However, some teachers are better at making useful adaptations in lessons than others. More work is also needed to support middle leaders and teachers to identify the essential knowledge they want pupils with SEND to know and remember. This will help teachers plan learning that is accessible for pupils with SEND in all subjects across the curriculum.

Actions to improve behaviour are effective. Staff understand and use the behaviour policy with greater consistency. Pupils say it is now rare to see other pupils escalate through the behaviour policy. Pupils are calm and lessons orderly.

Additional support

You have made strong use of external support. This is often secured through the collaborations established by the trust. For example, skilled staff have been seconded into key positions to focus on and improve literacy. Governance arrangements include useful systems and processes for leaders to report to the board. The level of challenge provided by executive leaders in the trust has supported you to stay sharply focused on improving the academy. Opportunities to work with and share practice alongside other trust schools have had a positive impact on curriculum planning and expectations.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the director of school improvement and chief executive officer from the multi-academy trust, a selection of subject leaders and those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

Together with the headteacher and head of English, I visited a selection of lessons in English, mathematics and modern foreign languages. During these visits, I spoke to pupils and looked through their work. I met with the lead practitioner from the communication and interaction resource base and the SEND lead from the trust. I scrutinised leaders' evaluations of the academy's effectiveness, leaders' plans for

improvement and a letter from Devon County Council in relation to the academy's work with children in care.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
Her Majesty's Inspector