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Mark Golden
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Dear Mr Golden

Special measures monitoring inspection of Kirkby College

Following my visit with Chris Stevens, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Ellenor Beighton and Stephen Long, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 13 and 16 July 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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.

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

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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 Nottinghamshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 13 and 16 July 2021

Context

Since the last full inspection of Kirkby College in January 2018, there have been several changes to the leadership and staffing of the school. The previous executive headteacher and the head of school have both left the school. The school's deputy headteacher took on the position of acting headteacher in March 2018. This appointment was made permanent in September 2019. Several new leaders have joined the school, including an assistant headteacher and subject leaders for English and mathematics. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) was appointed in March 2021. Several new governors have been appointed since the previous inspection, including a new vice-chair.

Some aspects of leaders' plans to improve the school have been delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes leaders' ability to put in place strategies to improve attendance and the work of governors.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders have not maintained the pace of improvement noted in the first monitoring visit in July 2018. This is, in part, due to the impact of the pandemic, but there are other factors at play. Leaders did not act quickly enough on some of the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection and in the first monitoring visit. These issues remain significant areas of weakness.

Leaders have been too slow to draw up and implement effective curriculum plans in all subjects. In some subjects, leaders have identified clearly the weaknesses in the curriculum and started to tackle these. For example, in English, leaders recognised that the curriculum lacked ambition and did not prepare pupils well enough for their future learning. Gaps in pupils' knowledge left them unable to achieve well in this subject. The curriculum in English has been redesigned. It now includes opportunities for pupils to build on their prior learning. Pupils are better able to understand their work because they are being better prepared for it. In history, pupils are able to discuss confidently the creation of the police state in Nazi Germany. A well-planned curriculum in these subjects is helping pupils to learn well.

In other subjects, it is not clear what the curriculum intent is. Not all leaders have identified clear end points to which their curriculums are building. They have not identified the component knowledge that pupils will need to reach these end points. Some subject curriculums remain poorly planned. Senior leaders have asked subject leaders to draw up new plans which will be implemented in September. Leaders have left too little time to check and improve the quality of these plans before they are put in place. Some of these plans do not show clearly enough how they will plug the gaps in pupils' learning. Not all leaders are building an effective curriculum.

Leaders and staff are not ambitious enough about what pupils can achieve. A culture of low expectations persists in some subjects. The work that is set for pupils is often not sufficiently demanding. Teachers do not check pupils' learning carefully enough. For example, teachers do not ask questions of pupils that test how well pupils have understood the learning. Teachers accept work that is brief and lacks detail. They do not challenge pupils who do not put enough effort into their work. Even in subjects where improvements have been made, the implementation of the curriculum is not consistently effective. Some pupils lack the technical skills to write clearly and confidently. At times, they fail to see the purpose of their learning.

Leaders have not given staff clear guidance about how to plan and teach an effective curriculum. The school's approach to improving the quality of education is confused. Leaders have provided staff with too many different instructions. One member of staff who responded to the staff survey described this approach as 'overwhelming'. Leaders undertake a lot of quality assurance, but it does not focus on the right things to improve the quality of education. The information that leaders collect about how well pupils are doing is not always accurate.

The appointment of a new SENCo in March 2021 is beginning to improve the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For example, the SENCo quickly realised that some pupils' needs had not been identified correctly. As a result, she ensured that these pupils were placed in more appropriate sets. All pupils who have an education, health and care plan have had their plans reviewed to check that the right support is in place. Leaders have now identified the right priorities for this area of their work. However, they have been too slow to act. Some teachers told the inspectors that they do not know well enough how to support pupils with SEND. They worry that, as pupils are taken out of their lessons to catch up on work, they are missing new content and falling further behind. Some of the parents and carers of pupils with SEND comment positively on the support their children receive. Others do not feel that their children have been well supported or that leaders communicate well with them.

Following the additional monitoring visit in February 2021, leaders have taken positive steps to improve reading. The leader for reading has drawn up a programme to develop reading across the whole school. Reading is now a priority. For example, staff use tutor time to read with pupils and do book reviews. Leaders have put support in place to help some pupils catch up with reading. However, this means that these pupils miss other important learning.

Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that the school is improving and behaviour is better. During the inspection, pupils conducted themselves well around school, followed instructions and arrived at lessons on time. However, inspectors noted some poor behaviour and inappropriate language in classes that staff did not challenge. Some parents who responded to the survey via Ofsted Parent View expressed concerns about behaviour.

Staff morale is improving. The majority of staff think that the school has improved since the previous inspection. A few members of staff spoke with inspectors to explain the positive changes they see in the school. For example, one member of staff said, 'We are now all in it together. We know that attendance and safeguarding are everyone's responsibility.' Leaders are mindful of staff's well-being. This has been a key focus during the pandemic. Leaders have done some things to reduce workload, such as changing the marking policy. However, other actions have added to staff workload.

Leaders have improved pupils' attendance overall. They have added more staff to the attendance team who call parents and follow up pupil absence. The attendance of some pupils is not improving quickly enough. Leaders and governors have not done enough to understand the reasons why, for example pupils with SEND do not attend as well as others.

Some senior leaders have many roles and responsibilities in addition to their teaching commitments. They do not have the capacity to make and sustain the necessary improvements. Some aspects of leadership responsibilities are still confused. For example, different leaders check on the attendance and well-being of pupils who attend alternative provision, but it is not clear who has full oversight of these pupils.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have improved this area of their work. Leaders and staff know pupils and their families well and are quick to identify when pupils may need support. They use the school's systems well to ensure that concerns are recorded and acted on. They work well with external agencies when this is needed.

Governors are committed to the school. Many have personal connections with the school. They feel that the school now has a better place in the community. After the last full inspection, governors met with all staff to check on their well-being and assure them that things would get better. Governors have undertaken training to help them be able to challenge leaders more effectively. Some of the actions they had planned, such as linking with different departments, have not happened because of the pandemic. Governors have not done enough to ensure that leaders maintain a consistent pace of improvement since the last full inspection.

The school's current improvement plan is not fit for purpose. It does not identify clearly enough what the school still needs to do to improve. It does not provide governors with the right information that would help them to know whether the school is improving quickly enough.

Additional support

The school has worked with a range of external partners since the last full inspection. Some of this support has helped leaders to identify weaknesses and

tackle them, for example in English. However, the school has had too many different forms of support. This has left leaders confused about the right actions to take. Attempts to re-broker the school into a multi-academy trust have not been successful.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They spoke with staff and pupils. The lead inspector met with representatives of those responsible for governance, including the chair of the governing body. Inspectors looked at the school's arrangements for safeguarding and at documents relating to behaviour and safety. They scrutinised the single central register. They looked in detail at curriculum plans in a range of subjects. They spoke with alternative providers and visited the school's in-house site for alternative learning.