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Neal Holder
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Holder

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Farringdon Community Academy

Following my visit to your school on 15 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 the 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 strategies for supporting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are deployed by all teachers
- ensure that assessment procedures allow teachers to check precisely what pupils know and can remember from the taught curriculum in all subjects.

Context

Since the additional monitoring inspection in January 2021, two new governors have joined the local governing body. An associate assistant principal has joined the school's leadership team on a temporary basis.

At the time of this inspection, approximately 80% of pupils were working remotely. Several members of staff were also working off site. Pupils working remotely are being provided with lessons to access from home.

Main findings

Leaders have carefully considered the ambition of the school's curriculum. New subjects, such as music and engineering, have been introduced. The pathways that pupils follow in key stage 3 have been amended to ensure that all pupils access a broad range of subjects.

Subject leaders have improved their curriculum plans. They have reviewed the list of topics being taught in their subject. Leaders have considered the order in which topics are taught. They have provided teachers with clarity about how new topics build on those previously studied. Leaders of subjects have worked together to develop their plans. Leaders in mathematics and science, for example, now meet regularly to ensure that there is consistency in the methods of calculation used across school. Pupils spoke highly of the retrieval tasks introduced at the start of lessons to recap content from previous sessions.

Senior leaders are clearer than some teachers and pupils about the way assessment is used to support teaching. Some staff, and pupils, see assessment as a way of generating grades and levels, rather than explicitly checking what pupils know from the taught curriculum. You have established an assessment working group and recruited an additional senior leader to improve the way assessment is used in the school.

You have made several changes to how pupils with SEND are supported in school. Two special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) work closely with the autism spectrum provision leader. They are knowledgeable about the needs of individual pupils who require additional support. They aim to improve the way this knowledge is shared with teachers. Some parents and carers of pupils with SEND would like to know more about the support provided to their child.

The SENCOs have started to work with subject leaders to demonstrate how teaching can be adapted to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Teachers of all subjects have also received training in this area. However, adults' learning and understanding in this area of work remains inconsistent.

Attendance has improved over time. However, the pandemic has stalled the overall rate of improvement in this area. Some pupils are still not as committed to learning as they should be. You are aware of the challenges ahead to further improve attendance. You are making further changes to the way pupil absences are managed to help address this. It is too soon to see if these actions will have a positive impact on pupils' learning and attendance.

Work to improve pupils' behaviour is having some success. The number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen year-on-year. However, you are aiming for exclusions to reduce further. You are confident that the introduction of the new subjects will help to engage some of the pupils whose behaviour is most challenging. Older pupils recognise the improvements to standards of behaviour over time. Pupils feel safe at school and know where to get help if they need it. Pupils consider bullying to be rare.

Pupils at the earlier stages of reading are well supported. Some pupils benefit from a phonics-based intervention programme, led by an appropriately trained teacher. Others are involved in alternative reading intervention schemes. All pupils are encouraged to read. Subject leaders have considered where reading can be promoted in their individual subject areas. However, pupils feel that some teachers could do more to promote a love of reading in their lessons.

New governors have recently been appointed. Governors' minutes show that they ask some challenging questions of leaders. However, you have identified that governors sometimes do not probe the information that leaders provide. There is work afoot to train governors further to ensure that their contribution to school improvement strengthens.

Additional support

You are continuing to receive support from the Department of Education's 'ONE Vision' schools programme. Some of this support has focused on improving pupils' attendance. Participation in this programme has allowed you to establish a professional link with a school currently judged as outstanding. Leaders from the supporting school have recently assisted you with the development of your subject leaders, and with the appointment of a new teacher. Colleagues from Durham local authority also continue to support the school with various aspects of school improvement, including developing the curriculum and increasing rates of attendance.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, teachers, pupils, a school improvement partner and representatives of those responsible for governance. I also met with the two SENCos and the autism spectrum provision leader. In all meetings, we discussed the actions being taken to improve the school since the last inspection.

I also reviewed various curriculum plans and looked at a sample of pupils' work. I considered the 31 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and 62 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

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

Yours sincerely

James Duncan
Her Majesty's Inspector