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Daniel Cowling
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Dear Mr Cowling

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oak Wood School

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 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.

Context

Leaders have returned to their full curriculum. Since the additional monitoring visit in February 2021, there have been some changes to staffing. Eleven teachers are leaving at the end of this academic year, including one of the deputy headteachers.

Leaders have appointed two new deputy headteachers for September 2021, along with a number of new teachers. The school will be fully staffed in September 2021.

Main findings

You and your leadership team have a clear vision for raising standards in the school. Since your appointment in April 2020, you have set tightly focused targets based on the areas for improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. Leaders review their actions regularly and make sure that they are making a difference. The five-year strategy plan is ambitious and staff share your vision. Pupils, parents and carers can see the improvements in the school. They feel that leaders are putting the right measures in place.

When you took up post in April 2020, you decided that pupils' behaviour needed urgent improvement. Leaders have put a number of strategies in place, some of which evolved from COVID-19 restrictions. For example, pupils start the day by lining up outside and are escorted to form time by their tutors. The start of the day is orderly and pupils come to lessons ready to learn. The new behaviour policy is embedded across the school. Pupils and staff are clear about behaviour expectations and the system of sanctions and rewards. Classrooms are, for the most part, calm and settled. Sometimes learning is still disrupted by low-level behaviour.

Exclusions are still too high, particularly permanent exclusions. However, leaders have put new measures in place to work with pupils at risk of exclusion. This involves carefully identifying individual needs and finding the right support from specialist staff and external agencies. Leaders can see the positive impact of this work through the reduction of fixed-term exclusions and incidents of poor behaviour.

The safeguarding team is strengthened by pastoral support staff. These members of staff have the time to check in on pupils' emotional well-being and, as one leader said, 'nip things in the bud'. Pastoral staff help to resolve any friendship issues or disputes that may occur, for example. This helps leaders to deal with any incidents of bullying effectively. Pupils also have access to counselling services on site. They spoke highly of the care and support they receive at school and are confident that staff will deal with any concerns they may have.

Curriculum development is not as advanced as leaders' work to improve behaviour. This has been hindered by changes in senior leadership and the impact of COVID-19. You and your leaders have agreed 'curriculum principles' for all subject leaders to follow. Leaders at all levels have high aspirations for pupils and want to give them the best opportunities to succeed in later life.

Currently, pupils in key stage 3 do not have a broad and balanced curriculum. They have had limited opportunities to learn in subjects such as the creative arts and food technology. This has led to a low uptake of pupils studying these subjects at

GCSE. English Baccalaureate (EBacc) entries are also low but starting to improve. From September 2021, pupils will follow a three-year key stage 3 curriculum. This follows extensive discussion and reviews of pupils' current learning in Years 7 and 8. Leaders found that pupils did not have the necessary knowledge to prepare them for key stage 4.

Leaders have been working towards this change for some time. Curriculum leaders have thought carefully about what they intend pupils to learn from Year 7 to Year 13. They have used the national curriculum as a benchmark and mapped out what pupils will learn and when. You have funded staff membership to relevant subject associations. Teachers said this has been useful in helping them develop subject expertise. Lessons are structured according to a set teaching model, with clear expectations for each lesson. For example, lessons start with a recap of previous learning to check what knowledge pupils have retained. The curriculum plans have not been implemented long enough to have a sustained impact on the quality of education.

Leaders have put appropriate measures in place to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities accessing the curriculum. A group of pupils in Year 7 work in the 'Acorn Class', receiving additional support from specially trained staff. Weaker readers in other year groups have extra help with their reading, such as strategies to sound out unfamiliar words. This includes pupils with English as an additional language.

Leaders have raised the profile of reading across the school. This is evident just from walking around the building, with signs on classroom doors showing what each member of staff is reading, for example. A 'drop everything and read' session takes place each week. A new accelerated reading programme has started in key stage 3 and pupils read in form time every day.

Some of the governors, including the chair, have worked with the school since the previous section 5 inspection. They have a clear understanding of the school's performance and support school leaders well. New governors have provided valuable expertise and challenge in specific areas.

Additional support

You have set up new links with various schools in the local area for leaders and staff. This has helped staff with curriculum planning in particular. Leaders continue to work closely with the local authority. The school improvement partner provides valuable external evaluation of the school and strategic advice to you and your leaders.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, pupils, a group of curriculum leaders, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited a range of classrooms with senior leaders and talked to pupils in lessons. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school improvement plan and policies relating to behaviour. I also considered the responses to the Ofsted questionnaires, from 55 parents and 60 members of staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Jude Wilson
Her Majesty's Inspector