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Lee Hadley
Principal
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Dear Mr Hadley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Haberdashers' Abraham Darby

Following my visit to your school on 15 September 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 a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing 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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that teachers check pupils' understanding effectively, in order to identify and address errors and misconceptions
- ensure that teachers help pupils make connections about what they are learning, to deepen their understanding of the curriculum.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have made some key appointments. A new vice-principal and two assistant vice-principals have joined your leadership team. You have also expanded the leadership of mathematics and appointed two new members of staff to your pastoral team.

Last year, all year groups were affected by periods of self-isolation due to COVID-19. This was particularly the case for pupils in Year 8 and Year 10.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on pupils' attendance. You have already noticed that attendance at the start of this term is lower than where it was at this time last year.

Main findings

Despite the disruption of the pandemic, you and your leadership team have maintained a focus on school improvement and have looked to address the areas of weakness identified at the previous inspection.

Leaders have acted quickly to improve behaviour. A new behaviour policy that helps pupils to learn well was introduced in September 2020, which outlines key principles of effective behaviour. Leaders regularly review information about behaviour and identify any patterns or trends. Leaders also use a house points system to reward positive behaviour. Staff have been trained to help implement this behaviour policy with greater consistency. Early indications suggest this is leading to improvements across the school.

There has been a significant improvement in the leadership of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have acted decisively to reintegrate pupils back into lessons to access the full curriculum. Senior leaders have carried out checks with subject leaders to ensure that curriculum plans support the learning of pupils with SEND. Staff have received training on how to support pupils with speech and language needs. As a result, staff have a better understanding of how to support pupils with SEND in their subject.

Leaders have also improved the school's social, emotional and mental health hub to better support pupils with these needs. Pupils can access a wide range of support. This includes therapy sessions and work with professional services, while continuing with their studies. Leaders are clear about this being a short-term provision that helps support pupils back into routine lessons. Pupils value the support this provision provides.

Leaders have prioritised their work on improving the quality of education. This work continued during the periods of national lockdown. Subject leaders have developed their curriculum plans so that topics build in a logical order. This is particularly the case

in English. In Year 7, for example, pupils learn about life in Victorian London in preparation for studying the novel 'Oliver Twist'. As a result, pupils are beginning to make links and connections between the texts and characters they are studying.

Reading remains a high priority. As part of the English curriculum, pupils have 'reading for pleasure' lessons. During these lessons, pupils read carefully chosen books from a diverse range of cultures. There are also a small number of pupils with SEND who have group intervention sessions to help develop their phonic knowledge. This is leading to improvements in their reading.

Leaders have strengthened mathematics by introducing a new curriculum. Topics have been carefully sequenced to take account of prior learning. There is appropriate emphasis in the curriculum on understanding and problem-solving. Leaders ensure that teachers work closely together to plan activities. There are positive signs that there is greater consistency in the teaching of mathematics.

There are similar strengths in the wider curriculum. In religious education, for example, leaders have created an ambitious curriculum. Pupils develop a strong foundation of knowledge to engage with complex ethical, moral and faith-based issues. There is also appropriate support put in place for non-specialist teachers to help with planning and teacher subject knowledge. Consequently, more pupils are opting to study this subject at key stage 4.

You recognise that there is still more work to do to continue improvements to the curriculum. In some subjects, pupils are not always clear about why they are completing certain tasks and are not able to make connections in what they are learning in order to deepen their understanding. Although teachers are using a range of strategies to help pupils remember more, these are not always used well. Some teachers do not check pupils' understanding effectively enough to ensure that misconceptions and errors are spotted quickly.

Additional support

Leaders have used an external provider to help develop the curriculum in both English and mathematics. Teachers continue to attend regular curriculum training sessions with this provider. Senior leaders have also been part of the Department for Education's behaviour hubs programme.

The chair of the trust is extremely knowledgeable and has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The chair of the trust is clear about how leaders are held to account but also how they are provided with support. The trust has several committees which provide expertise and experience to help with school improvement. The local governing body provides a high degree of scrutiny and challenge and is clear about its delegated duties from the trust.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the principal, other senior leaders, pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I also visited lessons and held meetings with subject leaders to discuss curriculum plans. I looked at information on the school's website.

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 Telford and Wrekin. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Howes
Her Majesty's Inspector