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4 November 2021

Andrew Fowler  
Principal  
Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy  
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Dear Mr Fowler

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 5 October 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 COVID-19 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 leaders of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) review curriculum plans alongside curriculum leaders, to identify strategies to support teachers to meet the needs of all pupils
- make sure that all staff are aware of the individual needs of disadvantaged pupils so that any barriers to learning can be addressed
- continue to improve pupil self-regulation so that fixed-term and permanent exclusions further reduce
- provide pupils with additional opportunities to make a positive contribution to the life of the school.

## **Context**

The current principal was appointed shortly after the school's previous section 5 inspection in June 2019. Several other senior leaders have also been appointed since then. A new chair of the governing body started in September 2021. The structure of the wider governing body has changed from the one previously in place.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school's participation in the 'Opportunity North East' school improvement programme has been extended. Within the school, leaders have retained some of the changes made to the school day which were implemented during the pandemic. This includes staggered breaktimes and lunchtimes.

## **Main findings**

Leaders have sought to address many of the previously identified weaknesses at this school. New stability within the senior leadership team, coupled with changes to the structure of the governing body, has provided the capacity for this to happen.

Improvements have been made to pupils' curriculum entitlement. The pathways pupils follow have been reviewed and widened. In key stage 3, for example, all pupils now study a modern foreign language and religious studies. This was not previously the case.

Senior leaders now mentor all subject leaders. They have worked together to create 'rapid action plans' for all subjects. These are used to identify and track the improvements needed in individual subjects. In some subjects, such as mathematics, these plans have helped to accelerate the pace of change. However, leaders of SEND have had less input into subject plans. As a result, teachers have not received enough subject-specific advice on how to meet the needs of pupils with additional needs in their lessons.

Subject leaders have reviewed the topics that pupils learn in primary school. Teachers have also spent time in local primary schools to better understand what pupils have learned before they start in year 7. This work has helped provide a greater focus in key stage 3 lessons.

You have also started to map out the links between key stage 4 and 5 topics within individual subjects. This helps less experienced teachers to know how to support pupils who have grasped topics more quickly than their peers. In mathematics, for example, it is clear how topics such as 'iterative processes' in key stage 5 build on the 'numerical methods' studied in years 10 and 11.

In some subjects, leaders have identified the key knowledge that pupils are expected to know in each year group. In geography, for example, staff know precisely what content pupils should be able to remember at the end of each topic. This allows teachers to know which topics to revisit with pupils on a regular basis. It also allows leaders to check the impact of teaching and provide additional support where needed.

In other subjects, it is less clear what the key concepts are that all pupils are expected to remember. This means some teachers move on too quickly before pupils have retained previously taught content. You already have plans to address this.

You have been keen to improve the consistency of teaching. Staff receive coaching in small 'professional learning groups', led by staff with particular teaching strengths. These groups have focused on aspects of teaching such as retrieval practice, mastery of skills, and delivering new content coherently. This is a relatively new project, so you have not yet been able to evaluate the impact of this work.

You are aware that some disadvantaged pupils have made less progress than their peers throughout the pandemic. You are keen to address this. However, not all staff know the individual learning needs of the disadvantaged pupils they teach. As a result, they are not catching up as quickly as they could.

A new senior leader has implemented revised behaviour management systems. Staff have been fully involved in these changes and spoke positively of some of the improvements. However, instances of poor behaviour still occur, and a small number of pupils struggle to self-regulate their behaviour. You have very recently engaged with a local school behaviour hub to further develop the school's work in this area. One of the aims of this project is to address the number of exclusions which remain high.

Some pupils want additional opportunities for their voices to be heard. They do not always feel they have enough ways to make a positive contribution to the life of the school. You have started to address this through the introduction of student leadership roles. Developing this further is important if your quest to develop confident, respectful and resilient pupils will be achieved. That said, pupils feel safe at this school. They are confident that any incidents of bullying will be dealt with when reported.

Governors operate more strategically than they did previously. New governors have been recruited and trained. They know the school well. They hold senior leaders to account for the progress they are making to improve the school.

## **Additional support**

The school has received external support through the Department of Education's 'Opportunity North East' improvement programme. Through this, the school has been paired with another school, which was judged as 'outstanding' at its most recent inspection. The support has focused on improving the quality of teaching, both in school and, throughout the pandemic, remotely. Leaders' confidence in addressing these areas has been strengthened by this support.

The school has chosen to engage with a regional school behaviour hub. This collaboration will involve auditing the school's current behaviour systems. Leaders are optimistic they will be able to use this support to make further changes to their approach to behaviour management.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with two subject leaders to further understand how their curriculum plans have evolved. I also met with representatives of those responsible for governance.

I made a number of visits to lessons and reviewed the quality of work in pupils' books. I spoke with pupils in their lessons, to understand what they had learned and remembered. I also spoke to pupils informally to gather their views of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

James Duncan  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**