

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 November 2021

Marc Peart
Headteacher
Wennington Hall School
Lodge Lane
Wennington
Lancaster
Lancashire
LA2 8NS

Dear Mr Peart

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Wennington Hall School

Following my visit to your school on 19 October 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in July 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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 towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 19 October 2021

Context

There are, at present, no cases of COVID-19 at the school. There are no current implications for staffing or pupils' attendance. Leaders have adapted the curriculum to enable pupils to catch up with learning lost during periods when restrictions were in place.

A consultation is taking place about the plans to close the school by the end of this academic year. Even though the closure has not yet been decided, the number of pupils is reducing. This is because leaders are identifying places at other schools that are suitable for pupils to move to.

An interim executive board replaced the school's governing body with effect from 1 September 2021.

During the additional monitoring inspection conducted in March 2021, inspectors found concerns related to safeguarding. Consequently, there was a close focus on safeguarding during this inspection.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Leaders are taking actions that are better focused on improving the quality of education in the school. However, they are aware that they are in the early stages of the journey. The newly appointed interim executive board is beginning to ensure that school leaders are building a stronger curriculum. The board has brought in an adviser from the local authority as an associate member. She is using her experience to help secure the necessary improvements. Leaders are now establishing a more coherent curriculum. They are also providing training and support to improve the way in which staff teach subjects. For example, teachers are starting to check more effectively that pupils understand what they learn.

The curriculum is becoming broader and more ambitious. Leaders are working with increasing success to meet pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, they carefully plan the specific support that pupils will receive to help them to learn. There is an improved structure to the curriculum in most subjects. Leaders have made better decisions about what pupils should learn and the order in which they should learn it. However, in some subjects, such as history and geography, the curriculum lacks the necessary learning content and the sequence in which it will be taught. This is because leaders have not begun their planned improvements to these subjects.

The increased training and support that leaders have provided for staff are beginning to have a positive effect. Staff are getting better at making sure that they clearly explain the knowledge that they want pupils to acquire. Teachers now carry out more day-to-day checks on what pupils can remember. That said, there is currently more of a focus on

testing at the end of topics and recording results. This means that teachers do not currently have a clear enough picture of the specific parts of pupils' learning which are missing.

In English, the curriculum is improving. Leaders have emphasised the importance of reading and building pupils' vocabulary. Some pupils are starting to use the new vocabulary that they have learned in their writing. A few pupils show that they can read with fluency appropriate to their age and ability. Many pupils, however, are still reluctant to read aloud and rely on adults to help them. Leaders now insist that pupils regularly take books home to read. Leaders have a system to check how well pupils are reading. However, there is further work to do before leaders have a more precise understanding of which aspects of reading pupils need to work on.

The mathematics curriculum has improved considerably. Leaders have introduced a new scheme of work. It clearly sets out the knowledge that pupils need to learn and when they will learn it. Pupils are starting to build on their earlier learning to make progress through the mathematics curriculum. The subject leader has made some changes to the order of the topics that pupils learn. This is to enable pupils to catch up on learning that they lost because they were reluctant to come to school during the pandemic. For example, some pupils need to learn more basic knowledge about shape before they can move on to learn about congruence and similarity. Pupils who spoke with the inspector said that they think that they are learning mathematics more effectively now. However, a few said that they sometimes find the work that they do too easy.

Leaders have an improved curriculum in place for French. It now contains the knowledge that pupils will need to build up their understanding of the language. The subject leader made changes to the curriculum to help pupils who missed out on learning during the period of COVID-19 restrictions. Pupils' books show that they are getting better at using what they already know to help them with new learning.

In art and design, there is a curriculum that covers the themes and artists that pupils will study in each year group. Leaders have decided on the order in which they will teach the curriculum. A sample of pupils' work showed that pupils can produce good-quality pieces. However, there is not enough information in the curriculum plans about the artistic techniques and skills that pupils will learn and in what order. This means it is unclear how this knowledge builds over time and how pupils will know which techniques to apply to their work.

Leaders now ensure that they manage pupils' safety and welfare properly. Improved supervision of pupils by staff is in place throughout the day. There is a detailed risk assessment for each pupil. This identifies potential hazards and risks related to the pupil's needs and contains suitable measures to manage them.

Leaders have rigorous systems in place to report concerns about pupils. Leaders are prompt in responding. They contact outside services, such as social care, as needed. The designated safeguarding lead and the school's pastoral officer are tenacious in following

up concerns with other agencies. Leaders provide staff with suitable safeguarding training. Leaders are also clear about the processes involved in managing allegations against staff.

Leaders treat pupils' absences as potential safeguarding concerns. Leaders are working to improve attendance by providing transport to and from school for some pupils. They contact parents and carers on the first day that there is an unexplained absence. Staff keep in daily contact with the colleges that some pupils attend part time to ensure that they are safe. Members of staff are also present at the colleges to further ensure pupils' safety during their time there.

Pupils who spoke with the inspector were unanimous in their view that the school is a safe place. They said that they can share their worries with members of staff, such as the key worker assigned to each pupil. They are confident that adults will listen and help. Comments that pupils made to the inspector included, 'The pastoral care is amazing'.

Staff said that they receive detailed training in safeguarding. They also have an opportunity every term to discuss with leaders their welfare and their programme of training. Staff said that leaders look after them well and try to make their workload as manageable as possible.

The new interim executive board has quickly established more robust systems to hold school leaders to account. There are frequent meetings, for example, to keep a check on the progress that leaders are making to bring about the necessary improvements to the school. Members of the board are clear about their role in that process. Their work is starting to have a positive impact on the work that leaders are doing to turn the school around.

Leaders have an improvement plan in place which is fit for purpose. The actions in it relate closely to the areas for improvement identified in the last section 5 inspection. However, some aspects are not as precise as they could be. For example, there are not enough measurable descriptions of how leaders' actions will improve education for pupils. This means that the plan does not help leaders to work out as clearly as possible how successful their actions are.

Additional support

Leaders appreciate the support provided by the local authority. Advisers and consultants have helped leaders to start to improve the quality of education at the school. They have trained staff to enable them to begin to improve aspects of the curriculum. For example, they have helped staff to use more effective ways of helping pupils to understand what they are learning in mathematics. The local authority has also helped leaders to bring in support from local schools where there is strong practice. An adviser from the local authority is now on the new interim executive board as an associate member to help bring about improvement. These actions are all making an effective contribution to the improvements that are beginning to happen.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, including visiting lessons and looking at pupils' work. He scrutinised documents, including those connected with safeguarding, and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils and staff. He held discussions by telephone with the chair and an associate member of the interim executive board and a representative of the local authority. There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey.