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Lorraine Taylor
Principal
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Dear Lorraine Taylor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hartshill Academy

Following my visit to your school on 27 January 2022, 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:

- continue developing the skills of middle leaders so that they ensure consistency and high expectations are embedded across their faculty
- continue to embed and build on the improvements in behaviour, attendance, teaching and learning already made.

Context

The school has been affected by outbreaks of COVID-19 at various points since March 2020. Some pupils have found it hard to return to school due to increased anxiety as a result of the pandemic.

You began working with the school in November 2021 and were appointed to the position of principal in January 2022. An interim executive principal was appointed at the same time to support you in driving school improvement. The Trust is enabling you to focus on the priorities for the school, with the Trust executive principal, for example, overseeing the new school build. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) was appointed in January 2022 following the promotion of the previous post holder. The SENCo holds the national SENCo award and was previously a member of the English department in the school.

A family engagement officer has been appointed to support pupils who find it hard to come to school regularly.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, trust and school leaders have set out systematically to improve the quality of education and behaviour in the school. During the inspection, it was clear to see that the five-year curriculum is being embedded and that attitudes to learning have improved. A deliberate focus on academic achievement, raising aspirations and embedding the 'Hartshill Way' is evident.

You have driven significant improvements since you began working with the school during autumn 2021 and especially since your subsequent appointment as principal. You have a clear vision for the school which has been communicated to all staff. You and your team are changing the culture in the school in order to reach even higher standards of teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance. You have established a realistic timescale for the school to be judged as securely good. You are ensuring that the right action is taken at the right time so that improvements are secured step by step.

You have set out roles and responsibilities for staff. You make clear how staff will be supported and challenged. High-quality coaching and ongoing mentoring for all staff are at the heart of the improvements you are making. The introduction of an instructional coaching approach is improving the delivery of the curriculum. Leaders have set out expectations for lessons and how staff should make the most of teaching time. Senior leaders provide 'in the moment' support and instruction to staff. This is creating greater consistency in the way that lessons are delivered and how pupils are supported to learn the curriculum. Teachers engage in dialogue about the strategies they use to teach the curriculum and willingly share their practice. Staff talk of one team working together now.

Senior leaders are beginning to work with subject leaders to develop subject-specific pedagogy. Reviews of each subject to identify the strengths and areas for improvement in each faculty have recently taken place. Senior leaders coach these middle leaders to develop their skills in order to check the quality of education in their faculty. They are being supported to hold people to account and ensure that pupils make better progress through the curriculum. This work is in its infancy.

Leaders have prioritised reading. They have developed and put in place a comprehensive reading curriculum. There is widespread evidence of investment in new books and resources for reading. A reading canon sets out the range of high-quality but challenging texts you want pupils to read. You ensure a focus on developing vocabulary and comprehension skills, as well as broadening pupils' cultural capital. Following the return to school after the national lockdown, more reading time was built in to help pupils catch up. Pupils are assessed and those who are not confident readers receive appropriate support. Some younger pupils were still unsure who checks their reading progress. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 have regular visits to the school library and daily reading sessions with class tutors. Pupils talk knowledgeably about the books their tutors are reading with them, including 'My sister sits on the mantelpiece' and 'Animal Farm'. Pupils and staff are enthusiastic about this reading time. You are establishing a culture of reading in the school.

At the last inspection, pupils removed from lessons due to their disruptive behaviour were noted to be missing out on learning. You have changed this. In developing the 'Hartshill Way' and establishing the Hartshill values, you have made explicit your expectations for behaviour and conduct. You have set in place systems for managing behaviour in classrooms and around the school. Pupils who are removed from lessons no longer miss their learning. They are expected to join another lesson and complete their work there. Although this change is relatively recent, pupils understand what is expected. Many more are choosing to concentrate on their learning from the start. Numbers of pupils removed from class have reduced substantially. Older pupils, in particular, say that behaviour has improved considerably.

You place a high importance on keeping pupils safe and ensuring their physical and mental well-being. The capacity of the safeguarding team has been increased from three staff members to 17 trained designated safeguarding leads. A carefully thought-out training programme ensures that all staff have regular opportunities to develop their knowledge in a range of safeguarding matters. For example, recent sessions on peer-on-peer abuse and sexual harassment help staff to confidently challenge any derogatory behaviour or language. Staff have a heightened vigilance and report concerns quickly. They care about pupils and want the best for them.

Pupils' attendance has improved and is now similar to that found nationally. You continue to work to raise the level of attendance of those who do not attend school regularly. Some pupils have struggled to return to school following the national lockdowns. The family engagement officer and attendance officer visit pupils at home. They work with pupils and their family to build their confidence and get them back to school. You ensure that

external agencies are involved where appropriate. Members of the board, including the raising achievement board, bring a wealth of expertise and experience to their role. They challenge and support you appropriately.

Although you have only officially been in post for a short while, green shoots of improvement are already evident across the school. It is clear that you and your leaders are building on the improvements already made since the last inspection and increasing the pace of improvement where it is right to do so. You have raised expectations further and are working effectively with your leadership team to establish the high aspirations you have for this school community.

Additional support

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, leaders have maintained the momentum of improvement. Trust leaders acted swiftly to address weaknesses in leadership so that the upward trajectory of improvement did not slip. The appointment of an interim executive principal present in the school on a daily basis has increased the leadership capacity in the school. It has also provided good support for the new principal.

The trust ensures collaborative working across all of its schools in order to develop the curriculum based on research and best practice. Support to improve the quality of education has been sought from experts in their field from across the country. An external perspective has been used to quality assure the work of the trust and ensure rigour and objectivity in its evaluation. Lines of accountability are explicit and clearly understood by all involved. Trust leaders are determined to improve the life chances of the pupils in their respective communities and celebrate the individual identity of each school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the executive principal and interim executive principal. I also met with other senior leaders, the chair and chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust and the director of education for the trust, pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I also met with curriculum leaders, pupils and staff to discuss the curriculum and behaviour. I carried out lesson visits with you and the senior leader responsible for curriculum. I reviewed documents on the school website and other documents shared with me in school, including minutes of the raising achievement board, school improvement plans and policies.

I met with members of the safeguarding team to discuss the school's arrangement for keeping pupils safe. I checked the single central record of pre-employment checks on staff.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Midlands Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Warwickshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Harwood
Her Majesty's Inspector