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Jackie Cooper
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Dear Ms Cooper

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to William Allitt School

Following my visit to your school on 2 February 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 to ensure that teachers check that the learning of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is secure before moving on to the next task.

Context

The William Allitt School is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of pupils with SEND is similar to the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan is slightly above the national average. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.

A new coordinator of the provision for pupils with SEND joined the school in April 2021.

Main findings

Leaders' actions are changing the academic culture and ethos of the school. The headteacher and senior leaders present a unified team. They are working with determination to improve the school. The school is highly inclusive. Leaders have placed pupils' best interests at the heart of their improvement work. Leaders, including those responsible for governance, have a good understanding of the school's current strengths and continued areas for improvement. Governance has strengthened. Governors have received effective training so that they understand their responsibilities. They hold leaders to account more effectively than in the past. Leaders ensure that they keep governors well informed about developments. Governors visit the school regularly to check what senior leaders are telling them.

Senior leaders have a clear vision about the future of the school. Clearly defined improvement priorities underpin this vision. Staff understand the vision. Their morale is positive. Relationships between staff and pupils are similarly positive. Most pupils recognise the improvements leaders are making. A pupil in Year 11 captured this when he said to me, 'it's not perfect, but it is a much better school than it used to be'. Leaders have improved the ways in which they are working with parents. They recognise, however, that further work is required to ensure that all parents know and understand the changes that are taking place.

Leaders, including all subject leaders, have comprehensively reviewed the curriculum. The previous monitoring report called on leaders to ensure that all aspects of the national curriculum subjects are delivered at key stage 3. Leaders responded swiftly to this recommendation. Subject leaders have checked all aspects of their subject plans to ensure that the requirements of the national curriculum are met. They have also reviewed their subject plans to make sure that teachers know the important knowledge pupils need to learn and the order in which it should be taught. Teachers who teach subjects outside of their main specialism are well supported to deliver the curriculum. Planning is consistent across all subjects, including the school's distinctive RISE (Resilience, Innovation, Skills and Employability) curriculum. During the inspection, I saw pupils developing their confidence, resilience and teamwork skills in preparation for a Year 7 community show at Burton Town Hall.

Leaders know that their curriculum plans are not yet complete, but they are well on the way to achieving this for September 2022. A higher proportion of pupils have opted to study the suite of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate in key stage 4.

Staff's professional development is central to the drive for improvement. Leaders have researched effective ways to inform teachers how to deliver the curriculum and check pupils' understanding. They have put a comprehensive training calendar in place. Subject leaders have used their training to inform curriculum planning. Staff value the training they have received. Leaders make regular checks to ensure that staff put this training into practice.

Leaders' actions are improving teachers' ability to deliver the curriculum. Expectations are higher than they have been in the past. In a design and technology lesson, for example, pupils were learning how to use a coping saw correctly to create a place holder for books. The teacher carefully showed pupils how to master their use of the tool, insisting that they needed to practise their technique accurately before attempting to make their product.

Leaders have ensured that teachers have clear expectations of how the curriculum is taught. Most teachers consider what pupils know already before introducing new concepts. They use 'retrieval tasks' well to check this. Pupils have improved their ability to make links in their learning, which is helping them to know and remember more. In geography, pupils show a good understanding of complex ideas such as natural climate change and the reasons for migration. Most pupils respond well to their teachers' questions. They told me that they found their work interesting and enjoyable. In all the lessons I visited, most pupils demonstrated their willingness to try hard and have a go.

Sometimes, however, teachers move on to new activities before ensuring that all pupils, including those with SEND, have fully understood their learning. Sometimes, pupils leave work incomplete or do not participate in discussions when they feel less confident about their knowledge. Pupils with SEND are better supported than they have been in the past. Leaders are improving how they check that these pupils are making similar progress to their peers in developing their knowledge and understanding across the different subjects.

Pupils' use of subject-specific terminology has been prioritised. Teachers plan how they use technical terms in their lessons. In a mathematics lesson, for example, pupils were intrigued by their teacher's explanation of how the symbol for division came about. This work is at an early stage of development. Pupils' understanding of subject words is not consistently secure across all subjects. Sometimes, pupils are presented with too many words or concepts for them to remember in a short space of time.

The school environment is calm and orderly. Most pupils are polite and friendly. Most are respectful towards each other and towards staff. Most uphold the school's PRIDE values of 'Presentation, Respect, Inclusive, Drive and Endeavour'. Leaders have recently introduced new expectations regarding behaviour. It is too soon to see the full impact of this work. I observed some small pockets of boisterous behaviour during break time and between

lessons. The pupils I spoke to told me that they are happy at school and that behaviour is typically calm and respectful. Leaders have formed a close partnership with the local police to check pupils' conduct outside school hours.

Most pupils attend school well. However, the proportion of pupils regularly absent from school remains high. Leaders are taking all reasonable actions to secure higher levels of attendance. The pandemic has slowed the progress leaders would like to make in achieving this.

Additional support

Leaders have ensured that their improvement plans draw on expertise that is external to the school. They have worked closely with leaders from several other secondary schools to support and check the effectiveness of their improvement work. However, leaders are not reliant on wider external support to bring about improvement. Relationships between senior leaders, governors and the local authority are positive and productive. The school has benefited from the support that it has received from the local authority.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with subject leaders for humanities and mathematics. I also met with members of the local governing body, including the chair. I spoke with the senior adviser for secondary schools in Derbyshire by telephone. I visited 10 lessons and looked at a small sample of pupils' work during these visits. I also spoke to pupils in lessons and around the school site during social time. I examined a range of documentation, including records related to leaders' checks on the quality of education and on staff training. I considered several curriculum planning documents, the school improvement plan and the 43 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector