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Sian Hartle
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Dear Mrs Hartle

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Wilnecote School

Following my visit to your school on 23 November 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.

Context

Since the school's previous inspection, the senior leadership team has been restructured. It now comprises of you, a senior deputy headteacher and six assistant headteachers.

New curriculum leaders have been appointed for computing, art, English, mathematics and physical education.

The number of pupils on roll has increased. The school is now at or close to capacity in Years 7, 8 and 9. You have revised roles and responsibilities of staff within the pastoral system. The school now has five 'houses' with mixed-age tutor groups, where it previously had three. Each house has an assistant headteacher and a non-teaching pastoral house officer.

The local governing body (LGB) has been reconstituted as a school standards committee (SSC). The school is part of the Community Academies Trust (CAT). Initially, as a response to COVID-19, CAT centralised some previously delegated functions, including health and safety and human resources. CAT has decided to keep these changes and LGBs have become SSCs with a focus on standards in the school, including the curriculum, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Main findings

The school's previous inspection report said that, 'The school is improving in all areas'. This improvement has continued at a pace in the intervening two and a half years. Leaders have addressed areas identified as needing to improve at the last inspection. They have also brought about improvements to other areas of school life.

The school is well led. You provide clear, empathetic leadership. Other leaders follow your example. Leaders think carefully about what alterations need to be made. They ensure that the rationale for changes is clear to all. They then carefully plan implementation, ensuring that staff are appropriately prepared and trained. This model has been evident in recent improvements to the English curriculum, the school's approach to reading and its provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Governance is strong. Members of the SSC know the school well. They provide strong support and appropriate challenge to leaders.

Pupils' progress in English had been weak for some time. It is now improving. The department is well led. The revised curriculum has been carefully planned to ensure that pupils' knowledge builds logically from year to year. Teachers are clear about what they want pupils to know and remember as they move through the scheme of work.

The school's assessment practice has recently been revised. It has yet to provide strong evidence of impact. However, it focuses well on determining how well pupils remember key aspects of the curriculum. Leaders and teachers are therefore well placed to make effective use of assessment information as it is gathered.

The school's approach to developing pupils' literacy, including improving reading, has been successfully embedded across the school. There is a whole-school literacy strategy

that includes several, carefully planned and implemented, strands. Despite COVID-19 and successive lockdowns, the literacy strategy is proving successful.

The school has a well-equipped library. It is used well. For example, all pupils in key stage 3 have a weekly reading lesson, half of which is in the library. All pupils have a weekly literacy lesson in one of their tutor times. These focus on a range of topics, for example developing debating skills. There is a whole-school focus on improving pupils' vocabulary in all subjects. Every classroom has a display of academic 'Ninja' vocabulary. Pupils who find reading more difficult are provided with additional support through a small group guided reading programme.

At the time of the previous inspection, the quality of support for pupils with SEND was variable. It has improved considerably. Leaders have trained staff in how to support pupils with SEND in their lessons. Leaders provide helpful information about pupils' needs and teachers are using it increasingly well when they plan pupils' learning. The implementation of this approach was slowed somewhat by COVID-19, but it is now moving on well.

Behaviour continues to improve. Classrooms are typically calm and places where pupils work hard and are keen to do well. Pupils told me that disruption to learning is rare. The school's use of suspension has decreased considerably this year, although over the same period, its use of internal isolation has increased a little. Leaders keep detailed records of inappropriate behaviour, including bullying, racist or homophobic behaviour and sexual harassment or sexual violence. Records indicate that such incidents are not common. This matched the views of pupils with whom I spoke with during the inspection.

Pupils know that the pastoral team are there to support them. Several pupils told me that they would go to the pastoral team if they had any concerns, for example about bullying. However, none of the pupils that I spoke with had cause to seek such support.

Leaders report an increasing number of pupils experiencing difficulties with their mental health, following the COVID-19 lockdowns. The school has put a range of support in place. This includes the recently expanded pastoral team and a revised programme of personal, social, health and economic education with one focus being on encouraging positive mental health and well-being.

Additional support

CAT has been instrumental in the school's continued improvement. It provides much central support for school leaders. Subject support networks provide opportunities for curriculum leaders from different schools to share good practice. Its programme for training and appraisal, 'Growing great people', has been well received in school.

Leaders have commissioned some external support, for example when developing the English curriculum. Leaders believe this has contributed well to the improved curriculum in this subject.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior and middle leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of CAT and the chair of the SSC, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I made brief visits to several lessons, accompanied by leaders. I observed break and lunchtimes and spoke informally with pupils at these times. I scrutinised several documents including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan and records of inappropriate behaviour and bullying.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector