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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Richard McManus
Principal
The Skipton Academy
Gargrave Road
Skipton
North Yorkshire
BD23 1UQ

Dear Mr McManus

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Skipton Academy

Following my visit to your school on 9 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school had 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 all teachers check that pupils have an accurate understanding of the subject-specific vocabulary that they are using in lessons.

Context

In December 2019, the school joined the Moorlands Learning Trust. Two trustees from the previous board of trustees joined the new trust board, one of whom is now the chair of trustees. Once the school had joined the new trust, leadership capacity was expanded. Three senior leaders have been seconded from the other school in the trust until the end of this academic year. Two of these leaders work in school on a part-time basis and one leader works in school on a full-time basis. Three assistant principal positions will be created from September 2022, along with other middle leadership positions.

COVID-19 has slowed the rate of some areas of school improvement, particularly in relation to pupils' attendance. At times, the pandemic has resulted in staff absences. This has meant that you and other senior leaders have spent more time teaching lessons for absent colleagues. Nonetheless, this has not distracted you from focusing on school improvement.

Main findings

Leaders have continued to take considered and effective action to improve the school. You have united staff at all levels, and everyone is on board with the vision that you have for the school. Much has improved in The Skipton Academy. You have an accurate view of the school and know what still needs to be better in order for it to become a good school.

You have enthused your staff and raised expectations. Your aim is to 'raise the bar' for pupils and broaden their horizons. Staff are now more ambitious for pupils. Shared expectations of what pupils can achieve are higher. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who are well supported. A higher proportion of pupils stay on in education when they leave the school, including increasing numbers who go on to attend the sixth form at the other school in the trust.

Your efforts to engage with the community have worked. Shrewd investment in the pastoral system has forged stronger links with families. The school's reputation in the local community is much improved. You have record numbers of pupils applying to join the school in September 2022. Nearly all parents and carers who completed Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire said that they would recommend the school.

You identified correctly that the curriculum needed significant strengthening. With the support of the trust, you have focused on curriculum development, as well as addressing other priorities identified in the previous inspection. Subject leaders have accessed high-quality training so that they know how to develop the curriculum. This work is now bearing fruit. More teachers are planning sequences of lessons that deliver the intended curriculum and that build pupils' knowledge over time. Some departments, such as humanities, are further on than others. You are appointing more curriculum leaders to accelerate this progress across all subjects.

Teachers have benefited from training on how memory is developed. Assessment is now used well by teachers. They check that pupils have learned important knowledge before moving on to new content. Pupils feel more confident about what they have learned, and confirm that teaching is helping them to achieve. Leaders identified that pupils should use subject-specific vocabulary more routinely in their work. Teachers do introduce this language, but do not always check that pupils accurately understand the terms that are being used. On some occasions, the activities planned by teachers do not ensure that pupils learn this important vocabulary.

You have ensured that reading and literacy are high on the agenda. A substantial proportion of pupils arrive in Year 7 needing support with reading. The special educational needs coordinator has ensured that staff are trained to deliver the wide range of reading interventions in place in school. Careful assessment is used to ensure that pupils get the right support to improve their reading.

Behaviour around school is calm. There is a warm community feel at social times. Older pupils feel that behaviour is much better and that bullying is well handled. Sometimes, teachers' expectations for behaviour can vary. This confuses some pupils. You recognise that while behaviour has improved, there is more to do to ensure that all staff share the same expectations for pupils' behaviour.

Attendance had improved at the time of the previous inspection. This improvement continued until the school closed to most pupils in March 2020 due to COVID-19. Some pupils have found it a challenge to get back into good routines of attending school. You have employed more pastoral staff to support pupils to attend school regularly. Rigorous systems to monitor attendance are in place and this work is gathering pace once again.

Trustees have an accurate view of the school. They are well informed about the progress that leaders are making. Minutes of meetings show that trustees ask probing questions of leaders. Trustees understand the priorities for improvement moving forward, including the importance of developing a strong curriculum.

Additional support

The trust has been integral to supporting the school. The chief executive officer of the trust provides regular leadership support. Colleagues seconded from the other school in the trust have been effective in supporting you to improve the school. Teachers have benefited from being able to liaise with colleagues in the other trust school to develop their subject and pedagogical knowledge. You and your leadership team benefit from external links with the Red Kite Alliance to gain external validation of the improvements that are being made and to identify areas to further develop.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you. I also met with other senior leaders, the chief executive officer of the Moorlands Learning Trust, pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection.

I met with the subject leaders for mathematics, English and humanities. I visited lessons in these subjects, spoke to pupils and looked at pupils' work. I observed break- and lunchtime and spoke to pupils informally. I reviewed responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and scrutinised several school documents, including the school's self-evaluation document, school improvement plan and minutes from trustee meetings.

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

Yours sincerely

Graham Findlay
Her Majesty's Inspector