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Christine Smiles
Headteacher
Talbot House Trust
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Dear Mrs Smiles

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Talbot House Trust

Following my visit to your school on 1 March 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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 curriculum plans in all of the foundation subjects are ambitious and logical, and that key knowledge in these subjects is identified and that it is learned by pupils.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection in 2019, you have been appointed as substantive headteacher. In addition, an assistant headteacher, who is also the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), has been appointed. There is a new chair of the governing body. You have appointed a middle leader with responsibility for enrichment, the care team, and careers education, information, advice and guidance. The school has been open to all pupils during the pandemic. School staff supported families who chose not to send their children to school during this time. The proportion of pupils who attended school over the period of COVID-19 restrictions increased over time.

Main findings

You and your team have been effective in improving many aspects of provision at the school. One striking example is the improvement in the behaviour of pupils. Many of your pupils have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. You have ensured that members of staff are well trained in techniques that help to avoid conflict and help pupils to control their emotions. Your school is now relatively calm. Pupils try hard to show respect to each other and to members of staff. The number of times that members of staff need to intervene with individual pupils to ensure that the school and its classrooms are calm has reduced over time.

All of your pupils have education, health and care plans. The proportion of pupils with autism spectrum disorder moving to your school has increased over time. You have responded to this change well. You and your team have ensured that staff have been trained in order to support these pupils. You have thought carefully about the school environment and how the day is structured to help these pupils. You want to support pupils, but also to challenge them. As an example of this, I saw some pupils engaged in a music lesson that was taught by a teacher who was new to them. They were in a larger group than usual and were in a different classroom. This was an ambitious and successful move. Pupils responded well to the situation and learned more about dynamics and pitch.

Mathematics is an example of a relatively well-organised and ambitious curriculum at your school. Important mathematical concepts and knowledge are prioritised. The curriculum is planned so that pupils return to mathematical themes. This helps teachers to make sure that pupils remember key knowledge. You are aware that there is work to do in other subjects. This clarity in planning is not in place for all subjects.

You think carefully about how to help new pupils when they move to your school. You make sure that you get to know the specific needs of new pupils, including those with autism spectrum disorder. Your teachers use this information to help to plan for their arrival. You check to see what pupils know in individual subjects to help teachers to adapt curriculum plans to support individuals.

Other examples of the improvements that you have made are linked to the personal development of your pupils. Your care team helps to make sure that pupils are calm and

able to focus well at school. There has been a focus on improving the quality of afternoon enrichment activities. Pupils welcome this. Some of these activities help pupils to prepare for adult life and others help them to focus on potential future employment.

Governors and staff know that improvements have been made at the school. They also know where further developments are needed. Inspection evidence confirms that the strategies you have used to support an improvement in pupil behaviour and attendance have been successful. What you do to help pupils' personal development has also improved. Greater clarity on exactly what you want pupils to know, and by when, in each subject is needed. There are some better examples of this, but this is currently still too variable.

Additional support

You have received some support from your school improvement partner historically. You access networks and support from different forums, including the local authority. You do not currently have a school improvement partner. The chief executive and chair of governors have plans to address this. I am of the opinion that additional support would be beneficial in relation to the areas that you have correctly identified as needing further improvement.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and your assistant headteacher, who is also the SENCo. I visited lessons and spoke to staff and pupils as I toured the school. I looked at documentation, including the school development plan and your own self-evaluation. I spoke to four curriculum leaders and looked at their files. I spoke with the chief executive and the chair of governors and considered minutes from governing body meetings. I held a meeting with the former school improvement partner and looked at reports linked to her visits to school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive of Talbot House Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle
Her Majesty's Inspector