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Simon Goodwin
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Dear Mr Goodwin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to South Wirral High School

Following my visit to your school on 6 April 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:

The school continues to require improvement. Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action toward the school becoming a good school.

Leaders should take further action to:

- ensure that the personal development curriculum in the sixth form is coherently designed and delivered so that students learn about healthy relationships in sufficient depth.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been some changes in leadership and staffing. A new assistant headteacher was appointed in September 2019. In addition, a new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), assistant SENCo, subject leader for modern foreign languages and second in department for mathematics have been appointed. Within the wider staff structure, a number of new teachers and support staff have joined the school. Three new governors have been appointed to the governing body. In addition, one associate governor from a local university has been appointed to increase the expertise of the governing body. The number of pupils on roll at the school is rising.

Leaders' plans for improvement have been disrupted by the absence of some staff for periods of time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, you have continued to take positive steps to improve the quality of education. You have wasted no time in developing an action plan that is focused on the correct priorities. Staff reported that they feel that the school is moving in the right direction. They share your vision for improving the life chances of pupils and students in the school. Staff enjoy working at the school and their morale is high.

Soon after the previous inspection, you overhauled the curriculum structure across Years 7 to 11. This is leading to pupils learning subject content in greater depth as they move through the school. You have also reviewed and developed the choice of subjects in key stage 4. This is increasing the proportion of pupils who follow the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects.

You have worked closely with subject leaders to develop ambitious subject curriculums across Year 7 to Year 13. Subject leaders are benefiting from ongoing training and support from leaders in local schools and external consultants. The design of subject curriculums is improving. Many subject leaders have identified the key knowledge that they want pupils to learn. They have thought carefully about the order that they want teachers to teach subject content. This is helping pupils to revisit and build on their learning. That said, curriculum design is further ahead in some subjects than others.

Subject leaders value the coaching programme that you have put in place. This is helping them to improve their leadership skills and check the delivery of their subject curriculums. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They provide pupils and students with opportunities to revisit prior learning. Teachers are beginning to use assessment

strategies more effectively to check what pupils and students know and to spot any misconceptions that they may have.

You have put in place a range of effective strategies for the use of additional funding. You check the impact that it is having on disadvantaged pupils' learning. These pupils are beginning to receive more effective support than they did in the past. Consequently, they are learning more over time.

You have made reading and literacy an increased focus across the curriculum. Leaders quickly identify pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read. Weaker readers are well supported and helped to catch up with their reading knowledge. You have ensured that subject curriculums have a clear focus on developing pupils' subject-specific vocabulary and comprehension skills. Pupils in key stage 3 have more opportunities than in the past to read for pleasure. You have plans to improve the reading offer further for older pupils.

Staff have raised their expectations about pupils' behaviour. Most pupils reported that behaviour is improving and that fewer lessons are disrupted. You have improved the analysis of behaviour patterns so that you can identify and act on trends. This means that you are able to deal with any incidents of poor behaviour effectively. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in school during lesson times. You have created a staggered lunch system because the school has grown in size. This has minimised potential behaviour incidents and ensured that pupils can make the most of their unstructured time. Most pupils behave well at social times.

You have introduced a range of approaches to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. For example, you have appointed an additional student welfare officer. This is helping you to monitor pupil absences and work more closely with pupils and their families. These strategies are beginning to have a positive impact. However, the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils has been hampered by the pandemic.

Students in the sixth form are able to participate in a wider range of enrichment activities than was the case previously. They receive more focused subject-level support than in the past. Students feel well supported with their applications to university. However, some aspects of the personal development curriculum in the sixth form relating to healthy relationships are not taught in sufficient depth. This means that some students do not gain the knowledge they need for their future lives.

Since the previous inspection, an external review of governance has been carried out. It recommended a range of actions which have been implemented. Governors now challenge and support leaders more effectively. They have put in place a system where they meet regularly with subject leaders. This is helping them to gain a deeper insight into the development of subject curriculums.

Additional support

You have used the support from the local authority well to bring about improvement in many areas, for example increasing pupils' attendance. You have also made effective use of the support provided by two local multi-academy trusts and external advisers to make improvements to the curriculum. Useful links with other local schools have aided school improvement. You have also brokered support from an external teaching organisation to coach and develop subject leaders. An external review of governance was carried out by a national leader of education.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders, staff, pupils and students in the sixth form. I also met with members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. This was to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I discussed the curriculum with the subject leaders of mathematics and science. I also met with the senior leaders responsible for reading intervention. I visited a sample of lessons with a senior leader. I met with a group of pupils from Year 10 and students from Years 12 and 13 to discuss their experience of school life. I looked at samples of pupils' and students' work. I also observed pupils' and students' behaviour at breaktimes and throughout the school day. I spoke with pupils informally around the school. I examined a range of documentation, including the school development plan, minutes of governing body meetings, records of visits by external advisers and behaviour and attendance records. I checked the single central record on the suitability of staff to work with pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector