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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Paul Williams
Headteacher
Bramhall High School
Seal Road
Bramhall
Stockport
Cheshire
SK7 2JT

Dear Mr Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bramhall High School

Following my visit to your school on 21 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 three 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.

The school should take further action to:

- develop their assessment strategies so that teachers can check how well pupils have learned the intended knowledge outlined in the curriculum, particularly in key stage 3

- ensure a more rigorous approach to the implementation of the reading curriculum and further develop the quality of help and support for those pupils at the early stages of reading.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to the leadership of the school and staffing. You were appointed as the headteacher in September 2020. Within the wider staffing structure, several new teachers and support staff have joined the school. One new governor has joined the governing body. The number of pupils on roll at the school has increased.

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

Main findings

You, other senior leaders and members of the governing body have responded positively and swiftly to address the areas of improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Before your arrival as the headteacher, leaders and governors had acted decisively to overhaul the structure of the curriculum. These changes have ensured that the curriculum is now sufficiently broad and ambitious for pupils in key stage 3.

Since your appointment as headteacher, you and other senior leaders have continued to develop further the quality of education for pupils. Leaders have been adept at identifying appropriate priorities to move the school forward and much of this work is well underway. You are clear about those areas that still require further development and you are accepting of support to help you on your journey to becoming a good school.

Governors continue to maintain a clear oversight of the curriculum, holding senior and subject leaders to account for the quality of education for pupils. For instance, governors are now more knowledgeable about subject curriculums than they were previously. This helps them to gain a deeper understanding of how well the curriculum is being planned and delivered.

You are working to ensure that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), access the same curriculum as their peers. In addition, you have taken appropriate steps to ensure that an increasing number of pupils follow the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. You are determined that all pupils can choose these subjects should they so wish.

You have ensured that subject leaders have the resource and expertise required to develop curriculums further. Subject leaders are currently ensuring that teachers are clear about the knowledge that pupils need to learn. Subject leaders are also carefully considering the order in which teachers deliver curriculum content. This helps pupils to build on earlier learning. However, some subjects are further on than others. You have

appropriate plans in place to ensure that subject leaders continue to benefit from appropriate training and support.

Staff have received suitable support to help them deliver the subject curriculums. This is having a positive impact. For example, many teachers choose activities to help pupils to remember and recall previous learning. You and other leaders are currently supporting teachers in their use of assessment strategies. This is helping teachers to better identify and address pupils' misconceptions. However, some subject leaders and teachers are not as clear about how to check that pupils are secure in their learning over time. For instance, some of leaders' assessments have not been designed well to check that pupils have learned intended curriculum knowledge.

You have started to prioritise reading in key stage 3 and leaders have plans in place to build further on this work. For example, there has been a determined effort from staff to encourage reading, reopen the school library and to re-establish this as a reading hub. Pupils value the benefits of the library and they enjoy going there to read at social times. In addition, leaders have placed a clear focus on developing pupils' subject-specific vocabulary, and all staff have received appropriate training to support pupils with their literacy. The impact of this work is starting to become evident, but it is in the early stages of implementation.

More recently, you have introduced systems to identify and support those pupils in the early stages of learning to read. Currently help and support from staff are focused mainly on pupils in Year 7. The support for pupils in other year groups is still in its infancy.

The previous inspection report highlighted that a small proportion of pupils had difficulty regulating their own behaviour. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this problem. For example, some pupils have struggled to adjust to routines on returning to school. In addition, an increasing number of pupils have been affected by social, emotional and mental health issues. You have been proactive in responding to this situation by reviewing your behaviour policies and systems and appointing additional staff to focus on pupils' attendance, well-being and mental health. The staff and pupils that I spoke with during the inspection explained how they valued this support and that it helped pupils to remain in school, even during challenging circumstances.

Additional support

You have made effective use of the support provided by an external adviser to bring about improvements in a range of areas. This includes the introduction of a new behaviour policy and a strengthening of pastoral systems. More recently you have used support from the local authority to quality assure improvements to the curriculum. You are open to the sharing of good practice, and useful links with different schools have aided further development in other areas. You have recently accepted further external support from a national leader of education from a local school to begin a school improvement project.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders, staff and pupils. I also met with members of the governing body, an external adviser and a representative of the local authority. This was to discuss leaders' actions since the previous inspection.

I discussed the curriculum with the subject leaders of English, modern foreign languages, geography, history and science. I met with senior leaders responsible for literacy and reading. I met with leaders responsible for attendance and the SEND coordinator. I visited a sample of lessons with you and met with groups of pupils from Years 8, 9 and 10 to discuss their experience of school life. I reviewed samples of pupils' work. I examined a range of documentation, including the school development plan and records of visits by external and local authority advisers. I also checked on some of leaders' safeguarding documentation.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Downing
Her Majesty's Inspector