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21 July 2022

Mark Fairbrother
Principal
Heritage Park School
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Dear Mr Fairbrother

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heritage Park School

Following my visit to your school on 14 June 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.

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:

- work with appropriate bodies to quickly resolve existing strategic issues that are affecting the school moving forward
- ensure that the changes to the curriculum are fully implemented and checked on by leaders at all levels as a matter of urgency.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been substantial changes in leadership at all levels. There have been four changes in senior leadership. An interim executive board (IEB) was put in place in March 2020. The school is federated with another special school. Interim leadership arrangements have been in place since the interim executive headteacher left in February 2022. Both schools are currently led by separate principals. There continues to be some working together across the federation, such as in the shared leadership of English and mathematics, but the schools have been working more separately recently. These leadership changes have brought substantial and ongoing changes to the curriculum.

All pupils at the school have an individual education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school primarily supports pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.

Main findings

Constant change in leadership, COVID-19 and financial pressures have meant that decisions leaders have made have often had to be reactive. Leaders are still responding to some of these challenges, but work has become more strategic. Staff are on board with recent changes. Raised ambition can be seen in improvements in pupils' behaviour, attendance and safeguarding arrangements over the last year. Changes to the curriculum are much more recent and while intent is clear, it is too soon to see the effect of this work.

Leaders, including the IEB, are clear that many aspects of the school still need improvement. However, there has been recent attention to the right things and early signs of improvement can be seen. This is particularly notable in decisive action taken by leaders to ensure more pupils attend school every day. While still a work in progress, attendance is showing improvement. There are now stringent arrangements for contacting home, by telephone or by making a visit, when pupils do not turn up at school. Extensive work takes place with other agencies to try to give pupils and their families the right support. Staff consider what arrangements will work best for individual pupils. The work to instil families' understanding of why good attendance is so important now needs to be embedded.

There has been a careful review of the use of part-time timetables and the use of alternative provision. There has been a dramatic reduction in the use of both of these. More pupils are in school accessing the care and education that the school provides.

All pupils spoken to in lessons and meetings are positive about the support they receive from staff. Leaders' recent direction and provision of external training in understanding pupils' needs has had a positive impact on how staff help pupils to manage their behaviour. Incidents are reducing and pupils are generally able to re-engage in learning more quickly. Relationships around school are clear to see. They are making a difference to pupils. Pupils feel safe and are taught about how to keep themselves and others safe.

There is an improved understanding of safeguarding from staff. Staff know that if pupils are not in school, they become more vulnerable to outside influences. Staff are aware of the local risks pupils face. They can spot signs of distress or concern, and quickly put support in place when it is needed.

Although pupils are currently accessing a curriculum across a range of subjects, leaders and staff know that this has not met the needs of pupils well enough in the past. New curriculum ideas have been tried and tested, but they have not had the effect leaders, including those responsible for governance, have wanted. They have caused confusion for staff.

A new curriculum is currently being planned. Leaders have taken time to research the principles of an effective curriculum. They have undertaken a wide range of professional training and development to ensure that the new curriculum is ambitious. They have taken into account the needs identified in pupils' EHC plans. This work is purposeful. Staff speak confidently about why the curriculum is being planned in this way and the intended effect for pupils.

Although reading was not raised as a substantial area for improvement at the last inspection, leaders know how important it is to keep this subject at the forefront of the new curriculum. Many pupils enter school unable to read well. The reading leader describes a key stage 2 phonics curriculum that ensures pupils practise and build on the sounds they know with trained staff. She has recognised the need for the same expectations, training, precision and consistency in key stage 3.

The mathematics curriculum is now finalised. Plans exemplify the ambition leaders describe for all subjects, which matches that of the national curriculum. Leaders convey a good understanding of scope and sequencing, and the identified knowledge that they want pupils to learn, practise and remember. They have planned this alongside the assessments that will be used to check on how well pupils are achieving.

Careers guidance is being considered as part of the new curriculum. Subject leaders are working with the new careers leader to widen pupils' views and ambitions of the opportunities open to them. There are well-considered transition arrangements to other education providers.

The IEB has a realistic view of the school. IEB members know that there is still much to do and they are carefully considering the best way forward for the school. They have brought in the support of Learn Sheffield to help with the next stage of this journey. This has been particularly directed to ensure that leaders have the knowledge they need to define, put in place and check on an ambitious curriculum that meets the needs of pupils. They understand that the glimmers of improvement need to be checked and embedded to ensure that improvement accelerates. They understand the need for urgency in the implementation of the curriculum.

Additional support

The school was supported by a multi-academy trust until the start of this calendar year. Since this partnership was dissolved, the IEB has brokered the support of Learn Sheffield, particularly to support with the review of the curriculum. This work has only just started. School leaders have started to make connections with other maintained schools in the local area to share best practice. These connections with external agencies and providers will be important to maintain so that regular checks can be made on the effect of actions taken to improve the school.

Leaders and staff have worked closely with external agencies, such as Sheffield Autism Group. They have undertaken staff training in aspects such as trauma awareness and curriculum research findings. This work is supporting leaders in making necessary improvements.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the principal. I also met with other senior leaders, subject leaders, designated safeguarding leaders, representatives of those responsible for governance (the IEB), including the chair, and a representative from Learn Sheffield to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited lessons, spoke to pupils and staff and scrutinised documents, including: the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; minutes of meetings of the IEB; curriculum documents for mathematics; records of attendance and the use of alternative provision, and those relating to safeguarding.

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

Yours sincerely

Kate Rowley
Her Majesty's Inspector