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Gareth Jones
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Dear Mr Jones

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gateacre School

Following my visit to your school on 13 July 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 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 of the school.

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:

- identify the essential knowledge that pupils must learn in those subjects where the curriculum remains under development

- refine and strengthen the support that is in place for pupils who are behind with their reading
- improve further pupils' rates of attendance, which have been hampered by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Context

Since the previous inspection, there has been one change to the membership of the governing body. Several new teachers have joined the school.

Main findings

In response to the findings from the previous inspection, you have acted quickly to make many appropriate changes to improve the quality of education for all pupils. In conjunction with other senior leaders and governors, you have successfully amended the overarching structure of the curriculum, particularly in key stage 3. You have ensured that the curriculum on offer is increasingly ambitious for all pupils, including pupils with SEND. At key stage 4, pupils now have access to a wider range of subject choices. For example, more pupils are choosing to study the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects.

You and your leadership team have also taken effective steps to ensure that the broad topics that pupils must learn within the school's curriculum are now commensurate with the national curriculum. In many curriculum areas, subject leaders speak with increased clarity about the important knowledge that pupils must learn and in what order. In these subjects, pupils are successfully building on their prior learning over time. Pupils are making more secure links between the different concepts and topics that they are studying.

You and other leaders have undoubtedly taken many positive strides in the development of the curriculum. However, in a few subjects, you recognise that leaders are not as far ahead in their curriculum thinking as they are in other subjects. Some subject leaders are less secure about the essential knowledge that pupils must know and remember. That said, these subject leaders are receiving appropriate, ongoing support to develop their curriculum thinking further.

You and other senior leaders are now turning your attention to improving the delivery of the curriculum. You are providing suitable and regular training for staff. As a result, there is an increasingly shared understanding among staff about how to design learning activities that help pupils to retain important information. This training is being underpinned by expert knowledge and research. You are also working closely with subject leaders to improve how they check on the quality of the delivery of the curriculum in their subject areas. Some pupils told me that these developments are helping them to remember more knowledge over time.

Since the previous inspection, you and other leaders have evaluated the effectiveness of your systems to assess how well pupils are learning the curriculum. Teachers are more confident in checking that pupils retain important subject content. Staff are successfully identifying and addressing any gaps in pupils' knowledge. Subject leaders are also collaborating with other subject leaders, both in school and from other schools, to redesign strategies for end-point assessments.

Developing pupils' reading knowledge continues to be a high priority for you and other leaders. Senior leaders are encouraging pupils to embrace reading for pleasure. In addition, subject leaders are regularly identifying the specific terminology that they want pupils to learn and understand. This is helping pupils to develop their range of subject-specific vocabulary. You and other leaders have implemented a range of strategies to identify and support pupils who are behind with their reading knowledge. However, this support is not developed well enough to ensure that all of these pupils catch up quickly in line with their peers.

You had secured some strong improvements to pupils' rates of attendance prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the impact of the pandemic has thwarted your efforts. Consequently, you have seen a decline in some pupils' rates of attendance, particularly those pupils with SEND and those pupils who are disadvantaged. Alongside governors and other senior leaders, you are proactively addressing this issue. You have sought appropriate external support to review and refine attendance systems and procedures. As a result, you and other leaders are successfully identifying the barriers that some pupils and their families are facing. You are beginning to tackle these COVID-19-related attendance issues in a more systematic way. However, it is too early to see the impact of your actions.

Governors have maintained an accurate oversight of the quality of education that the school provides to pupils. They are working closely with you and external partners to hold senior and subject leaders more effectively to account for the quality of the curriculum that pupils receive. For example, governors have implemented effective processes to ensure that they can gain a more thorough understanding of the curriculum content and delivery in particular subjects.

Additional support

You are using external support well. You are ensuring that it is targeted on those areas requiring the most improvement. Teachers told me that they value the ongoing support that they have received to develop their curriculum thinking. Furthermore, you are using support from the local authority to audit and improve pupils' rates of attendance. External support continues to play an important role in helping you and governors to establish an improved quality of education for all pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders and pupils. I also met with representatives of those responsible for governance, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. In addition, I met with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection.

I discussed the curriculum with the subject leaders of science, mathematics, history, and art and design. I met with the senior leaders responsible for reading, attendance, safeguarding and behaviour. I visited a sample of lessons with you, and I met with a group of pupils from Years 8 and 10. I reviewed samples of pupils' work. I examined a range of documentation, including the school development plan. 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 Liverpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Downing
Her Majesty's Inspector