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Kieran Larkin  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Larkin

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lowton Church of England High School**

Following my visit to your school on 19 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 four 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 all pupils, including those who have additional needs, have access to the same curriculum as their peers
- embed their plans to support pupils who are behind with their reading to ensure that these pupils catch up quickly with their peers.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, there have been changes to the leadership of the school. You have been appointed as the headteacher. Several staff have left and a number of new staff have joined the school.

## **Main findings**

Since your appointment as headteacher, you and other leaders have acted swiftly to bring about ongoing improvements to the quality of education for pupils at Lowton Church of England High School. For example, in conjunction with the governing body, you have conducted a full staffing restructure. This has ensured that there is greater clarity and accountability in relation to staff's roles and responsibilities.

You and other leaders have continued to ensure that your improvement plans focus sharply on pertinent key priorities, which reflect better pupils' learning needs. For example, you quickly recognised that the predecessor curriculum did not offer the breadth and depth of content that pupils required. With governors and other leaders, you have designed a curriculum that is increasingly fit for purpose. For instance, you have overhauled the overarching structure of the curriculum. As a result, staff are now able to teach the full breadth of the national curriculum at key stage 3. This has improved the scope and ambition of subject curriculums, enabling pupils to learn more than in the past.

You are ensuring that all teachers have the ongoing training and support that they need to develop their curriculum thinking. For example, subject and senior leaders are increasingly adept in supporting teachers to identify the important knowledge that they want pupils to know and remember. Leaders and teachers are also thinking carefully about the order in which new information should be taught. Many pupils are now deepening their knowledge and understanding of subjects. Your leaders explained how they now feel empowered to make changes to what pupils must learn in the curriculum.

Now that the curriculum content is more established, you and other leaders are working to ensure further improvements to how well the curriculum is delivered. For example, systems for assessing how well pupils have learned and remembered knowledge have been rewritten. This is so that teachers clearly assess the knowledge that pupils learn over time. These changes are helping leaders and teachers to identify and address the gaps in pupils' learning. You and other senior leaders have also introduced a shared framework of teaching principles for Lowton Church of England High School and more

rigorous systems to check on the quality of curriculum delivery. This is helping pupils to build on their prior learning.

Although you have secured many positive improvements to the curriculum for pupils, the quality of education for a small group of pupils, including some who have additional needs, remains underdeveloped. Following the impact of the pandemic, leaders have adopted a range of strategies to reintegrate some of these pupils into school life. However, the adaptations that leaders have made for these pupils mean that some of them do not have access to the same curriculum as their peers. While the emotional needs of these pupils are increasingly being addressed, some of their learning needs are not. This is because the curriculum for these pupils lacks coherence in parts. As a result, some of these pupils are not catching up with their learning as quickly as they should.

Across the school, leaders have ensured that teachers now have access to high-quality information about all pupils with SEND. These plans are specific to these pupils' needs. Leaders check regularly how well teachers are using this information to address pupils' barriers to learning. They are providing further training and support for staff to ensure that this is increasingly consistent and effective.

Alongside senior leaders, you are prioritising reading across the school. Work is well under way to support the development of pupils' subject-specific vocabulary. Through well-structured training, leaders are successfully ensuring that pupils' vocabulary development is integral to the delivery of the curriculum across all subjects and by all staff. In addition, support is in place to help pupils who are behind with their reading. As such, you are redeveloping your systems of support to help those pupils who are behind in their reading to catch up quickly with their peers. This includes the introduction of systematic synthetic phonics for the weakest readers. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this work.

Since the previous inspection, you and other leaders have identified that the rates of attendance of some pupils, largely due to the impact of the pandemic, are now a barrier to their learning. You have been proactive in responding to this. More rigorous attendance plans are being put into place for pupils who are regularly absent from school. These are beginning to improve these pupils' rates of attendance.

The governing body works closely with you and your senior leaders to ensure that the impact of leaders' actions to improve the school is reviewed regularly. Leaders have improved the quality of information that they share with governors. As a result, governors have a deeper understanding of how well the curriculum is planned and delivered. This allows them to hold leaders to account more fully for the quality of education for pupils.

### **Additional support**

You are making effective use of support from external advisers and services to target improvements in a range of areas. For example, some curriculum leaders have received subject-specific support to develop their specialist knowledge and inform their curriculum thinking. In addition, you have used support to provide external verification, for example

of the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements. You are open to collaboration and the sharing of good practice so that the school remains outward-facing. This is helping staff to develop professionally and is ensuring that improvements are sustainable.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, teachers and pupils. I also met with representatives of those responsible for governance, representatives of the local authority, and representatives from the Diocese of Liverpool and the Diocese of Manchester.

I discussed the curriculum with the subject leaders of English, mathematics, art and design, geography and religious studies. I met with the leaders responsible for the curriculum, for reading and for pupils with SEND. I visited a sample of lessons. I met a group of pupils from Years 8 and 10 to discuss their experience of school life. I looked at samples of pupils' work. I examined a range of documentation, including the school development plan and records of visits by external partners. I checked the single central record.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Downing  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**