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Piccadilly Gate
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Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Clair Gooding
Headteacher
Skerne Park Academy
Coleridge Gardens
Darlington
County Durham
DL1 5AJ

Dear Ms Gooding,

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Skerne Park Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 25 May 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the CEO of the multi-academy trust, other staff, a trustee and members of the local governing body the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited mathematics lessons, spoke with groups of pupils, looked at pupils' work and reviewed school documents. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Skerne Park Academy continues to require improvement. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- Evaluate the content of the new curriculum and the teaching choices made in the delivery of the curriculum. Use this information to fine-tune the curriculum further so that it reflects the stated curriculum intent.
- Ensure that teachers more consistently check the knowledge pupils have learned and what they need to learn next across all subjects taught.
- Review the approach to the teaching of pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to check that this maximises learning and is in line with leaders' stated ambition to be inclusive.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, there has been a significant change in the leadership of the school. You took up the substantive post of headteacher in September 2022, after working in the school for a day a week during the summer term. Subject leadership has been devolved to individual teachers. They have been supported and trained in these roles by an experienced school improvement partner.

Since the previous inspection, you have started making improvements to curriculum plans. New curriculum plans were put in place in September 2022 for the foundation subjects. The planning identifies the key concepts that you want pupils to learn over time. It is sequenced in a way that builds up knowledge. However, you, and the staff team, have identified that the new curriculum is not sufficiently bespoke to deliver your curriculum intent. Nor do the current plans consider the gaps that pupils may have in their prior learning, resulting from the previous curriculum.

You have ensured that there is a more consistent approach to assessment. There are clear systems in place for tracking pupils against curriculum end points. Termly assessments are used to identify gaps in learning. Pupils receive specific interventions to make sure that they catch up. Subject leaders have a much better understanding of what pupils have learned. The feedback books used in mathematics show that teachers are encouraged to think about what has worked well in each lesson. They review the work of pupils and plan how to support pupils with any misconceptions they may have. You acknowledge that there are still some inconsistencies in this practice. Teachers do not always correctly identify those pupils who need additional support. Some teachers do not modify the way in which they deliver the curriculum when pupils are struggling to learn the concept being taught.

Since the introduction of the new behaviour policy, there has been a significant improvement in the behaviour shown by pupils in school. Staff and pupils are clear about expectations of behaviour. They understand the systems in place to manage behaviour. Pupils spoken to report a much calmer learning environment. They feel safe in school. In class, I saw very positive attitudes towards learning. On the playground, pupils were playing together and having fun. However, there are still some inconsistencies in the way the behaviour policy is implemented by some members of staff. Pupils report that a small number of lessons are disrupted because of this.

Pupils with the most complex SEND needs are educated in the 'Pathways' provision. Some pupils return to do some learning activities with their base class. Others remain in the Pathways class for most of their learning. There are a significant number of pupils, with limited staffing. Given the complexity of needs, staff are not able to fully maximise pupils' learning.

Leaders from the trust have been supportive in working alongside you and the governing body. They have brokered the school improvement partner who has made a significant contribution in terms of training and support. The trust has made changes to the building

entrances which improve safeguarding. This has also helped in identifying those pupils who are late to school so that guidance for parents can be put in place. Governors understand their responsibilities and show commitment to improving the school. Guidance from the school improvement partner has strengthened the support and challenge given to you and your leaders by governors. The governors particularly value their visits to the school to meet with subject leaders. These strengthen their knowledge and develop their ability to support your improvements.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Hummersknot Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Mary Cook
His Majesty's Inspector