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Paul Bousfield
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Dear Mr Bousfield

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Southlands High School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 14 September 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 received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspection.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior and middle leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, a group of trustees and governors and a representative of the local authority 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 met with groups of pupils and visited some lessons. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

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:

- support subject leaders to refine the important knowledge that pupils need to know and remember in each subject, and to ensure that the curriculum is being delivered consistently well

- ensure that teachers use the new assessment strategies effectively to identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Main findings

There have been numerous changes to the leadership and governance of the school since the previous inspection. You were confirmed in post as the substantive headteacher in January 2022. Since then, you have overseen several new appointments at senior and middle leadership level. Over the same period, several teaching staff have left the school and others have joined. Added to this, a new chair of governors and a new CEO of the multi-academy trust (MAT) have been appointed. Although it has taken time to make these appointments, they have added much-needed leadership capacity so that the school can improve further. Trustees and governors have rightly prioritised this. They have helped you to ensure that the pace of change has been sustainable.

You, along with other senior leaders, have made changes to the structure of the curriculum. The breadth of subjects studied at key stage 3 is now more ambitious. You have begun to remove the limitations on some pupils' subject choices at key stage 4. More pupils are studying a full range of GCSE subjects than before, including a sharp increase in those following the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. This reflects your increased aspiration for pupils' achievement. You have also ensured that all year groups can now benefit from a high-quality personal, social and health education curriculum. However, a small number of pupils in key stage 4, including some with special educational needs and/or disabilities, still experience a narrower curriculum than their peers. You are in the process of reviewing this arrangement to ensure that it does not continue to disadvantage these pupils.

Support from the MAT is helping to develop subject leaders' expertise in curriculum design. Subject curriculums are increasingly well organised. Teachers know what they should teach to pupils and when this should be done. Subject leaders understand the importance of identifying the essential knowledge and vocabulary that pupils should learn and remember. However, in some subjects, they are still refining this knowledge. Where this is the case, some of the new approaches that teachers are using to deliver the curriculum are not as effective as they could be. You and the senior leaders recognise the importance of continuing to work with subject leaders to ensure consistency in the way that teachers deliver learning.

While the new curriculum is embedding, it is important for subject leaders to consider how to address gaps in pupils' knowledge that remain as the legacy of the previous curriculum. You have recently introduced new approaches for checking how well pupils are learning the curriculum. Although these are in their infancy, they are intended to help teachers to identify and revisit pupils' missed or forgotten learning.

At this early point in the year, it remains difficult to evaluate the impact of these changes. Although you described some green shoots of improvement in the most recent GCSE

results, there remains significant work to be done to ensure that pupils are learning more and achieving more highly than in the past.

Alongside improvements to the curriculum, you have sensibly prioritised improving pupils' behaviour and conduct. In the past, this hindered pupils' learning. In a relatively short time, you and other leaders have introduced new routines and helped staff to raise their expectations of pupils' behaviour. As a result, the atmosphere around the school is becoming more positive and respectful. This is helping pupils to learn and to enjoy school more than they did in the past. Most behave well in lessons. Although some challenging behaviours remain, they are now being firmly and consistently addressed. Previously high numbers of suspensions and exclusions are beginning to fall.

You recognise that a small number of pupils, parents and carers are unhappy about recent changes to the school's behaviour expectations. You are listening to their views and are committed to continuing to improve behaviour.

Leaders, governors and trustees have an accurate view of the school's progress and the work that still needs to be done. Key governance structures have been restored, and there is now an open culture of support and challenge that was lacking in the past. You are making effective use of external advisers and support from within the trust to help you identify where improvement is still needed. The action plans that you shared with me are sensible and appropriate; however, some of the identified actions for improving the school further are imprecise. Greater clarity will help to ensure that leaders at all levels understand how to move the school forward.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the CEO of the Mosaic Multi-Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Ben Hill
His Majesty's Inspector