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15 November 2022

Rowena Hillier
Principal
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Dear Mrs Hillier

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Staffordshire University Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 19 October 2022, 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).

During the inspection, I discussed the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection with you, other senior leaders, the CEO of the multi-academy trust and governors. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also spoke with the leaders of mathematics and English, met with trust staff, visited lessons, spoke with pupils, looked at pupils' work and scrutinised documents, including safeguarding documents. I have considered all of these actions in coming to my judgement.

Staffordshire University 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:

- work with families to reduce levels of persistent absence
- strengthen the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), so they can access the ambitious curriculum.

Main findings

You have established an ambitious culture in the school. Staff share this ambition. You and your leadership team have worked hard to address the issues identified at the previous inspection. In all subjects, leaders are thinking carefully about what they want pupils to learn and when they should learn it. Pupils' learning is sequenced well and teachers ensure that they deliberately revisit the important knowledge they want the pupils to remember. You have ensured that staff share the mantra 'teach to the top'. Usually this works well. However, at times, for some pupils with SEND, their learning does not build on what they already know. For example, pupils worked confidently on converting complex decimals to fractions, but struggled to divide by five. At times, support is in place to ensure all pupils have the resources to be able to get the support they need, but this is not always the case.

You have worked to address the variability that existed in the delivery of the curriculum. All staff have had significant training on how to implement the intended curriculum. You have established a positive learning culture. Staff say they appreciate the 'drop-in' visits that leaders complete to see pupils' learning in action. One teacher said, 'I feel like I'm growing all the time. We are all learning. No-one is the finished product.' There is still work to do to ensure that these improvements are maintained in modern foreign languages. You have had difficulty to appoint and retain staff in this department, but are hopeful that recent appointments will help stability.

Developing whole school reading has been a priority. All staff have received training in how to use texts effectively to help pupils to develop reading strategies. An example of this was seen in the choice of text in a history lesson. Pupils were pre-taught key vocabulary before reading the text, so they understood the meaning. You have also considered how to support those pupils who struggle to read. These pupils receive support from a trained adult to help them to catch up with their peers. You plan to train all staff in their understanding of phonics.

Pupils' attendance was impacted by the pandemic, but it is now improving. Leaders acknowledge that there are still too many pupils who are regularly absent from school. Leaders are addressing this and the number of pupils who are regularly absent is declining. There is still work to do to ensure that all families understand the importance of regular attendance.

Safeguarding is effective. You have detailed systems for logging any concerns. Staff know the signs to look for, which may indicate that a pupil is at risk of harm. Staff also know how to make a referral to the safeguarding team.

Staff are very positive about their workload and well-being. They appreciate the things that leaders do that go above and beyond to support their well-being. During the inspection you were holding 'Well-being Week'. Staff spoke enthusiastically about the

different activities they did, such as pasta making, dodgeball and making ceramic toadstools. Staff say workload is manageable and leaders listen if they have a concern.

The trust provides a high level of targeted support for leadership development. Governors know the school well. They provide you with appropriate support and challenge. This is helping to drive improvements in the school. You have worked collaboratively with the trust and a range of external partners commissioned by the trust. You also work well with the local authority to ensure that safeguarding systems are robust.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Staffordshire University Academies multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Eve Morris
His Majesty's Inspector