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Dear Mr Robertson

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Aylestone School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 19 October 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.

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, the local authority, other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding leader and special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) coordinator and subject leaders, 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 lessons, looked at pupils' work, met with pupils and scrutinised documents relating to the curriculum, the school's provision for pupils with SEND, safeguarding and governance. I observed pupils during their breaktimes and spoke with members of staff on duty. I also reviewed the school's single central record to assess the checks made for the recruitment of new staff. 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.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, you have made a number of staffing changes. You have expanded the leadership and pastoral areas of the school. For example, you strengthened the senior leadership team by appointing a new deputy headteacher from September 2023. You have also increased the number of heads of year so that each year group has a specific member of staff linked to it. In some areas, you still need to recruit colleagues either in teaching or non-teaching roles. You know precisely where the school is short-staffed and are actively seeking to recruit to the vacant positions. The school has benefited from the support from two external trusts. The school has also received support from other local secondary schools. For example, you have benefited from support in monitoring the teaching and learning across the school. Also, leaders in other schools have offered some individual professional development for your staff around the structure and sequencing of learning.

During this inspection, we focused on the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection, relating to the sequencing and delivery of the curriculum, including the adaptations for pupils SEND, how effectively staff use assessments to check what pupils learn and remember and pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards their learning. The evidence shows that you have taken decisive and well-chosen actions to address these areas. There is an appropriate sense of urgency to the changes you are making. Staff are working well with you to implement these changes, and pupils are responding well too.

Following the last inspection, you actively reviewed how the curriculum is planned and sequenced in all subjects. You focused, initially, on a few specific subject areas that were identified from the inspection, but you have also worked hard to ensure that all subject areas have a clearly planned curriculum that builds key knowledge and skills. For current Year 11 pupils, you made the decision that an additional form group and additional subject classes in some areas were necessary to deliver more effective learning to all pupils. You are currently reviewing this model in terms of other year groups to ensure that learning is rapidly improved from Year 7 through to the end of Year 11.

Supported by a range of specialists from two trusts, you have made some improvements to teachers' understanding of how pupils learn and remember the curriculum. Pupils benefit from consistently applied principles of learning that outline how leaders expect the curriculum to be taught. Subject leaders have introduced targeted methods to support teachers' checking of pupils' learning. Most staff are making effective use of checking for understanding during lessons and use this to inform the content of subsequent lessons. You recognise that this essential part of practice needs to be embedded across all staff and with continued urgency. I spoke to many pupils who

spoke positively about the strategies used in different subject areas. Pupils explained the different 'techniques' used by different subjects. These techniques, such as starter activities, are called different names depending on the subject. These can confuse pupils moving between different subject areas. You will continue to review the techniques and names each subject uses to help pupils learn and remember, to ensure pupils understand precisely what they need to do.

During the inspection I visited a range of subjects and year groups. Along with your deputy headteachers, we saw calm and focused learning from pupils. Pupils who I spoke to, in the main, were able to explain their current work and how it linked to previous work. In some cases, the purpose of the learning was not clear. You continue to ensure that sequencing across a series of lessons is clear and precise, as is the content within a lesson.

The previous inspection called for more effective adaptations of learning for pupils with SEND. You have acted with urgent determination to improve information-sharing with staff so that there is clarity about identified needs, strategies to support pupils with SEND and what these pupils should achieve in their learning. You know the needs of pupils and have taken effective action to refine the key pupil SEND information, which is accessed by all staff. SEND support is effective and helps to close gaps between outcomes for pupils with SEND and pupils with no additional needs.

Additional staff, and changes to the pastoral structure, have enabled you to place a critical focus on behaviour. This is making a difference. Across the lessons seen during this inspection and during social times, there was no evidence of disruptive behaviour. Pupils were focused, willing to answer questions, engage with partners in paired work and work independently. Although there have been improvements to pupils' attitudes to learning, this remains a concern for some staff and pupils. You have taken steps to strengthen the strategies used to manage pupils' behaviour. You have increased the frequency and effectiveness of monitoring and evaluating the quality of behaviour within the pupils' learning. Regular visits to lessons by your senior leaders identify any 'hot-spots' and provide much-needed feedback to senior and subject leaders. Behaviour logs show fewer incidents over time. This should remain a priority to ensure that there is a consistent approach to managing behaviour and that staff are well supported in this regard.

The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is coherently planned and sequenced. You are mindful of the local and national context, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on some areas of pupils' personal development. For example, you have prioritised a significant amount of work on mental health in school and the wider community. During this inspection, pupils were able to explain fundamental British values and they could talk about career opportunities and online safety. Pupils spoke positively about the leadership opportunities available to them and welcome the chance to be on the school council and/or become a prefect. However, there was confusion from pupils as to how the PSHE curriculum is being delivered. Pupils gave a mixed picture around

their understanding of PSHE and 'Issues and Ethics' learning. You are aware of this and continue to review the delivery of PSHE in all year groups.

Safeguarding is effective. Expert leaders have clear systems in place to identify pupils at risk of potential harm. A well-developed and systematic approach to dealing with disclosures ensures that leaders take decisive and timely action to support vulnerable pupils. Extra capacity in the pastoral team enables trained staff to deal with low-level concerns appropriately. A coordinated pastoral approach, using tracking and strong lines of communication, ensures that support is timely and appropriate.

Governors understand their statutory responsibilities and have strengthened their skills in holding leaders to account. Senior leaders report that governors have worked effectively with the local authority and external agencies in support of the whole-school changes that they know are necessary. Relationships between governors and leaders are positive and purposeful. Governors are well informed about the school's development priorities and the progress now being made to achieve them. You recognise that while progress has been made, there are still areas to review and develop further for greater consistency. You have a realistic evaluation of the school's current strengths and challenges.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Herefordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Clarkson
His Majesty's Inspector