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Rachel Slattery
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Dear Mrs Slattery

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of George Hastwell School Special Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 22 November 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, other school leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO), other staff and governors 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 completed visits to lessons, scrutinised pupils' work, spoke to pupils about their work and future aspirations, spoke to staff, observed a number of pupils read to an adult and scrutinised documentation. 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:

- Provide support to leaders who are responsible for subjects so they can check the implementation of the new curriculum in all classes.
- Ensure that a system is in place to record the range of assessment information, so that staff and leaders maintain a better oversight of pupils' learning.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, a new assistant headteacher has joined the school. Two new governors have also joined the governing body. Students in the sixth form are now educated on the site of a local secondary school, which is part of the same academy trust.

The school has acted quickly to bring about improvements since the last inspection. The school's curriculum has been completely overhauled. The school completed much research and worked closely with another academy trust to establish a curriculum which puts pupils' learning needs at its heart. This was a significant undertaking and staff have been supported well to adapt to this new approach to learning. The new curriculum makes clear the specific knowledge that pupils need to learn and when they should learn it. In the main, pupils are now building their learning more successfully on what they already know. At times, however, in a minority of classes, staff do not follow the new curriculum as intended. In addition, the school's checks on whether the new curriculum is being delivered are completed by a small number of leaders. This means that any support required by staff to deliver the curriculum well is not consistently received in a timely way.

Teachers' use of assessment strategies was not consistently effective at the last inspection. Staff now use a range of assessment strategies more effectively. This helps them to understand pupils' learning needs in more detail. The school is currently finalising a system to gather all of this information in one place, so that staff and all leaders have all such information at their fingertips.

The school has invested in a range of reading books which are now closely matched to the sounds that pupils know. This means that pupils are mainly well supported when learning to read.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, now have more timely access to information about careers and other options for when they leave George Hastwell. The school engages regularly with a local careers hub, where it receives support and challenge around careers education. For example, the hub has helped the school to find links to local employers where students can experience the world of work. The overhaul of the curriculum means that more emphasis is now placed on pupils gaining independence and other life skills, such as teamwork and problem-solving. This ensures that pupils are better prepared for their next steps.

The addition of new governors has strengthened the capacity of the governing body. Governors now visit the school regularly to check the school's progress against the improvement plan. This helps the school to remain focused on the key priority of improving the quality of education on offer.

With the support of the trust, the school has worked closely with another academy trust, which specialises in the education of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Having access to this expertise has been crucial to help establish the new curriculum. This has improved the confidence of staff and leaders to deliver an improved quality of education.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the CEO of the Fells trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Westmorland and Furness local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hardman
His Majesty's Inspector