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Mr Ian Mellor
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Dear Mr Ian Mellor

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Waseley Hills High School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 06 December 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 vice-chair of the trust, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the chair of the local academy governing board, and 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

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 with SEND, how effectively staff use assessments to check what pupils learn and remember, pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards their learning and how effectively reading is being promoted across the school and the support for weaker readers. 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.

Since the last inspection you have made a number of staffing changes. You have expanded the leadership and pastoral teams in the school. For example, you have strengthened the senior leadership team by appointing a head of school, new deputies and assistant principals. You have also increased the number of subject lead practitioners in different departments and have increased the number of pastoral staff in each year group. You are fully staffed but continue to plan carefully to ensure that the number of specialist teachers in each subject area increases to reduce the number of staff teaching outside of their main subject. The school has benefitted from the support of the trust. The school has also received support from external specialists. For example, you have benefitted from support in monitoring the teaching and learning across the school.

Following the last inspection, you actively reviewed how the curriculum is planned and sequenced in all subjects. You focussed, initially, on the core and humanities subjects including English, science and history. However, you have also continued to review the foundation and option subjects. You and your leaders have worked well to ensure that all subject areas have a clearly planned curriculum that builds on key knowledge and skills.

Supported by a range of specialists from within and outside the trust, 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. Across the learning seen, staff are making effective use of checking for understanding during lessons and are using this to inform the content of subsequent lessons. I spoke to many pupils who reported positively on the same assessment strategies used in different subject areas. Pupils explained the consistent 'techniques' used in different subjects. These techniques, such as 'do now' starter activities and 'explore' activities, are enabling pupils to know and remember more of their learning over time.

During the inspection I visited a range of subjects and year groups. Alongside your head of school, deputies and assistant principals, we saw calm and focussed learning from pupils. Pupils who I spoke to were able to explain their current work and how it linked to previous work. In all cases, the purpose of the learning was clear. You continue to review the sequencing across lessons to ensure that the content within a lesson, is clear and precise.

The previous inspection called for more effective adaptations of learning for pupils with SEND. You have acted with urgent and rapid 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 and your leaders know the needs of these pupils and have taken effective action to refine the key SEND information which is accessed by all staff. The support for pupils with SEND 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. Following the last inspection, low-level disruption was seen to be affecting some learning. Across the lessons seen during this inspection and during social times there was no evidence of disruptive behaviour. Pupils were focussed, willing to answer questions, engaged with partners in paired work and work independently. 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 potential lessons or times of the day where learning could be affected by low-level disruption. Senior leaders provide much-needed feedback to subject leaders and teachers. 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, some pupils were able to explain British values and they could talk about career opportunities and online safety. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, spoke positively about the leadership opportunities available to them and they welcome the chance to be on the school council and/or become a prefect. You continue to evaluate how the 'Culture' (PSHE, morning registration) and 'learning 4 life' (PSHE, timetabled period) lessons blend and are delivered consistently across a wide range of staff. You continue to review the delivery of PSHE in all year groups.

You have taken steps to support pupils with low literacy levels and to promote a wider love of reading across the school. However, these actions remain at an early stage of development. You have identified pupils with the lowest levels of literacy, and you ensure they have designated times with staff, during 'Culture', to improve their reading ability. In

the new year there are agreed plans to develop staff expertise around phonics and how this will be delivered to enhance the literacy of all pupils. Your reading leaders will evaluate and further develop systems to support the weakest readers as well as develop wider reading opportunities for pupils in school and at home.

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.

Leaders responsible for governance understand their statutory responsibilities and have strengthened their skills in holding leaders to account. Senior leaders report that trustees and governors have worked effectively with the local authority and external specialists in support of the whole-school changes that they know are necessary. This includes the growth in school numbers and a planned new build due to begin in January 2024. Relationships between trustees, 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 trustees and the CEO of the Central Region Schools trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Clarkson
His Majesty's Inspector