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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Mrs Louisa Rogers
Acting Headteacher
The Winsford Academy
Grange Lane
Winsford
Cheshire
CW7 2BT

Dear Mrs Rogers

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of The Winsford Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 11 July 2024, 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 a judgement 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 and carers, any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO), the deputy CEO, director of school improvement and other staff, 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 a number of lessons, met with pupils, carried out a work scrutiny, observed behaviour at lunchtime and reviewed documentation. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

The Winsford Academy continues to require improvement. Leaders have made insufficient progress to improve the school.

The school should take further action to:

- review the effectiveness of its strategies to improve pupils' rates of attendance across the school

- foster positive relationships between staff and pupils so that pupils' attitudes to learning and enjoyment of school improve
- support teachers to develop their expertise in curriculum delivery
- implement effective processes for checking on the impact of the quality of education and to support teachers to make good use of these to improve their practice.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, the school has continued to face considerable challenges with staffing. There has been much instability and uncertainty in senior leadership with many staff taking on temporary leadership roles. Furthermore, the school has been battling to fill vacant teaching positions, which has impacted negatively on the quality of education that pupils receive. It is only very recently that the school has been able to move forward in addressing this turbulence in leadership and staffing by making some substantive appointments. This includes the appointment of a substantive headteacher, a deputy headteacher and a director of school improvement.

The pace at which improvements have been implemented has slowed considerably since the previous inspection. The school has not acted quickly enough to improve the quality of education that pupils receive. While subject curriculums are well organised, improvements to how well the curriculum is delivered are not happening as well as they should. There are still too many staff who lack the expertise to deliver the curriculum as leaders intend. This is particularly the case where the school has not been successful in filling teacher vacancies. At times, staff do not design activities that help pupils to remember their learning. Added to this, there is too much variability in the quality of work that pupils produce. Pupils are not developing a secure enough understanding across the curriculum. They are still not achieving well enough.

The school, together with the trust, recognises that its processes for monitoring and checking the quality of education in the school need refining. To this end, it has appointed a senior leader with responsibility for quality assurance. Nevertheless, staff need more support to enable them to use these processes to accurately evaluate the impact of subject curriculums and to identify priorities for further improvement.

The school continues to prioritise reading. Since the last inspection, support for pupils who find reading difficult has moved on apace. The school uses assessment information well to identify gaps in pupils' reading knowledge and to put in place effective support. This helps pupils to increase their fluency and confidence in reading. Moreover, pupils who are at the early stages of reading, including in key stage 4, are now supported successfully to read confidently. However, due to high levels of absence, there remains a number of pupils who do not benefit from this support. These pupils are unable to read sufficiently well and this is a further barrier to their wider learning.

The governing body has been strengthened. Governors better understand their role in challenging the school to improve. For instance, each governor oversees one of the school's priority areas. This allows them to gather useful information that enables them to hold the school to account more effectively. Similarly, the trustees have an insightful understanding of the shortcomings in the school. At the end of a turbulent academic year, with the help of the trust, the school is now at a point where the ship has been steadied. Appropriate foundations have been laid upon which the trust can support the school to build on moving into the new academic year. However, the time that this has taken has further contributed to the decline in the quality of education that pupils receive.

The school has made some headway in clarifying its expectations around behaviour with 'The Winsford Way'. In addition, the school now employs a more restorative approach to getting pupils back into lessons. This is beginning to bear some fruit. Pupils are reintegrated back into class more quickly than in the past. However, pupils' attitudes to learning still do not align with what the school expects. A small number of pupils disengage in lessons, for example, by putting their head on the desk. Some pupils do not actively take part in learning. Instead, they are unenthusiastic and passive. They do not try their best. This is rarely challenged by teachers and further compounded by weaknesses in the delivery of the curriculum, which contributes to gaps in pupils' learning. This is partially because there are still inconsistencies with how well staff apply the behaviour policy. Many pupils are unhappy with the poor behaviour of their peers, both in lessons and on the corridors. This continues to adversely affect their learning experience.

The school is focusing its efforts on improving pupils' rates of attendance. For example, there is additional capacity in the attendance team and improving analysis of attendance data. This is helping the school to better understand pupils' barriers to attending regularly. More recently, there have been some promising signs, albeit for a very small number of pupils. Despite this, attendance rates continue to decline and are worryingly low. Nearly half of the school's pupils are persistently absent from school, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Poor attendance, coupled with the weaknesses in the delivery of the curriculum, is further impeding improvements to how well pupils achieve.

Due to the turbulence in staffing, pupils are not benefiting from consistent relationships with staff. This is contributing to their lack of enjoyment of school. Some pupils who follow the school's rules diligently feel overlooked. These pupils would like to be rewarded for their good behaviour. The school is seeking some external support, for example working with local schools and the Department for Education to improve pupils' rates of attendance. Most of the support for the school is coming from the trust. However, many of the changes made are too recent to have stemmed the decline in the quality of education that pupils receive.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Fallibroome Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of

children's services for Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Jones
His Majesty's Inspector