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Mrs Jane Galbraith
Lathom High School: A Technology College
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Dear Mrs Galbraith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lathom High School : A Technology College

Following my visit to your school on 6 June 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in June 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- tackle urgently pupils' sustained low overall attendance, especially that of those who are disadvantaged and who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, so that attendance improves quickly towards the national average.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior and subject leaders, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A representative of the teaching school supporting Lathom High School met with me to tell me more about this external support. Your deputy headteacher joined me in observing teaching and learning in a science lesson. The school improvement plan and post-Ofsted action plan were evaluated and checks carried out on arrangements to keep pupils safe, including those done when new staff are appointed. I scrutinised a wide range of

documentation during the visit, including on pupils' attendance and behaviour, pupils' progress and leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have restructured senior leaders' roles and the pastoral system. You have introduced a house system with changes in the way pupils' attendance and behaviour is managed. Pupils who joined the school from a neighbouring school that closed continue to progress through the school. The most recent arrivals other than at the usual point of admission are in Year 10. This year group includes around 40 pupils, about a third of the cohort, who only joined the school in September 2016, having completed key stage 3 at their previous school.

Main findings

You immediately tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection to make certain that information available from your existing systems is used well by leaders, for example in checking for any patterns in pupils' attendance and behaviour. Some systems needed further refinement before reliable information could be used well enough. For example, the new assessment system, now based on accurate teachers' assessments, is used well by teachers in planning work to make sure that more pupils are able to achieve their potential. Teachers are becoming skilled in using what they know about pupils' previous learning to plan work which is of the right level of difficulty for them. Teachers have received training in improving their questioning skills so that they know how to encourage pupils to think harder about their work. Teachers are now more confident in providing work which challenges pupils, including the most able. A few teachers are still developing these skills, but the support they are receiving is helping them to improve.

You recognised that there was an urgent need for greater consistency across the school and you are well on the way to achieving this. Due to changes in staffing, teaching is now more effective across the school and this is leading to improvements in attainment. Attainment for Year 11 pupils is already higher than the GCSE results in 2016, particularly in geography, science, art, history and in languages. Where monitoring identifies weaknesses in teaching, support plans are put into place for teachers. These plans have time-bound objectives linked to external support through the local authority and the teaching school. As a result of this intensive support, teachers are improving their practice. In addition, you have used teacher appraisal effectively to improve teaching.

You and your subject leaders use the monitoring of teaching well to identify strengths and ensure that these are shared across the school. For example, teachers who demonstrate strong marking and feedback to pupils help other teachers to improve their skills in this area. The quality of pupils' work in books is improving because effective practice is shared. Subject leaders recognise the improvements in the presentation of pupils' work in books, which is already better than that seen in the last inspection. Pupils take more pride in their work and appreciate the opportunity to make improvements in response to teachers' suggestions. Senior leaders carry out

regular checks on the quality of teaching through formal lesson observations and informal short visits to lessons. They regularly check on pupils' progress from pupils' work in books. Information from termly assessments is used to inform judgements on teaching over time as well as enabling teachers to identify pupils who need additional support at the first sign of progress slowing. These formal termly assessments are supporting pupils in developing resilience and supporting their understanding of examination-type questions.

Senior leaders hold subject leaders to account for pupils' progress in their area through regular weekly meetings with their line manager. They share analyses of achievement information with their department and teachers are responsible for identifying gaps in learning and providing additional support to help pupils to catch up. Regular reviews of this support are carried out to make sure it is having the desired effect, and is modified where this is not the case.

External validation of the school's work is rigorous. This includes joint observations with senior leaders, but also with subject leaders whose skills in monitoring are improving as a result. Checks made on the accuracy of teachers' assessments have been especially helpful following the move to the school's new assessment system using the new GCSE grades. Schemes of work have been rewritten to align with the raised expectations of the new assessment system, which ensures that pupils are better challenged in their work.

Behaviour is improving because pupils now have more challenging and interesting work as a result of improvements to teachers' planning. Leaders launched a new behaviour policy in November, which all staff follow in a consistent way, following their training on the new expectations. As a result, there was an initial rise in the number of behaviour incidents recorded as pupils adjusted to the raised expectations of their behaviour. Low-level disruption and defiance continues to be a concern in the case of some pupils but there is an overall reduction in the number of pupils excluded for poor behaviour. Leaders work well with neighbouring schools to provide a range of strategies to help pupils to learn how to manage their own behaviour. This includes respite placements in other schools and work with the pupil referral unit to support pupils with the most challenging behaviours. Other strategies to improve behaviour include planned changes to the curriculum and the school day. The move from a six-period to a five-period day seems a sensible one to reduce the number of afternoon lessons and the number of lesson changeovers. Both aspects, identified from leaders' monitoring, are key times when poor behaviour occurs. Pupils are now able to choose some of their subjects from Year 9, which has the potential to support better engagement in learning.

Attendance continues to be a barrier to improving pupils' progress. Overall attendance remains broadly similar to the previous year, continuing to be low. School information indicates that the difference from the national figure is likely to increase. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is likely to reduce slightly but continues to be high and about double that seen nationally. Attendance monitoring systems have improved considerably but these are not having enough

impact or improving attendance quickly enough, especially for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Parents condone many absences and do not fully understand the importance of regular attendance. As a result, these pupils are missing out on education and making less progress than their classmates who attend school regularly. Pastoral leaders check on absence and daily home visits result in many pupils being brought into school. Pupils attend for the rest of the day as a result of this strategy but have missed lessons earlier in the day. Parents know when their child's attendance is an issue, but also when there is improvement, through pastoral leaders' meetings with families of pupils with low attendance and letters sent home. Leaders must urgently take further action to tackle the sustained low attendance.

Governors took decisive action to improve their work following their review of governance. Regular monthly meetings for all governors to review progress with the school's post-Ofsted action plan have replaced the previous committee structure. Although the post-Ofsted action plan is extremely detailed and shows clearly the tasks completed and those still in progress, it does not show clearly enough the impact of this work. Quantified criteria to measure success are identified in a separate document, which sits alongside the action plan and separate school improvement plan. Some further refining and streamlining of this documentation is required to make sure that the actions completed have actually made a difference. Some improvements have already been made to the way pupil premium funding is used, following an external review by a teaching school and the local authority. Governors now plan a further review of progress with these actions, to be carried out shortly.

External support

Leaders draw on a range of effective external support provided to the school by the local authority and through partnership work with specialist leaders of education and senior leaders from Penwortham Girls' school, a local teaching school. Additional external support is brokered to meet identified needs, such as external consultants working with the mathematics department. This support is already making a difference in science, English, geography and music, where improvements to teaching are having an impact on improving pupils' learning and progress in these subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector