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Jane Galbraith
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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 18 November 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help that you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received four successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

Leaders should take further action to:

- support and train staff to identify accurately, and address quickly, deficits in pupils' reading knowledge.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, there have been considerable changes to the school's staff. New subject leaders have taken up post in each of the following curriculum areas: English, computer science, design and technology, geography, mathematics and science. In addition, there are new second in departments in English and in mathematics. Four new teachers have joined the school - three in science and one in humanities. Eleven new members of support staff have also joined the school.

A new chair and vice-chair of the governing body have taken up post. In addition, three new governors have joined the governing body.

Main findings

You, governors, your deputy headteacher and other senior leaders are on the right path to providing a high-quality education for the pupils at Lathom High School. To this end, you have collectively embraced the findings of the previous inspection, and you have wasted no time in responding to them. You have put into place a suitable improvement plan that focuses on the important priorities required for the school to improve further. You are determined that this will remain a dynamic document that responds swiftly and in a focused manner to any additional priorities that emerge.

Governors have not shied away from their responsibilities. They recognised that in the past they have been too accepting of what leaders told them. More recently, governors have acted to strengthen their oversight of the quality of education that the school provides to pupils. For example, governors have put into place a system where they meet regularly with members of the senior leadership team to evaluate the impact of their actions to improve the school. This is ensuring that governors gain a deeper understanding of the various aspects of the school's work, including whether subject curriculums are sufficiently ambitious for pupils. That said, governors are frustrated that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has hampered their efforts to improve the school at the pace that they would have liked.

You have acted quickly to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of subject leadership. Senior leaders' and governors' actions have led to a predominantly new middle leadership team being appointed since the last inspection. You are ensuring that every subject leader is provided with high-quality leadership training and bespoke subject-specific training, including around curriculum development. This is so that subject leaders have the essential knowledge and skills to drive improvements in their departmental areas. It is also helping to enhance their knowledge and expertise in the subjects that they teach and lead. As a result, you are confident that you have a team in place which is taking the right steps to improve the quality of education across the school.

Immediately after the last inspection, you and other senior leaders took the bold decision to overhaul the curriculum. Collectively, you made significant changes to the way in which the curriculum is organised for pupils across Years 7 to 11. This is because the previous

curriculum did not provide pupils with sufficient opportunity to learn subject concepts deeply enough. In addition, you have taken appropriate steps to ensure that considerably more pupils in the current Year 10, including disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are studying the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. The teachers whom I spoke with said that the changes you have made to the curriculum are helping pupils to build up their subject knowledge more effectively.

The developments that you have made to the overarching curriculum structure have enabled improvements to be made to the quality of subject curriculum planning. Subject leaders have thought carefully about the order in which they need to teach new topics and concepts. In addition, in certain subjects, the increase in available curriculum time across Years 7 to 9 has meant that new subject content is being added to these curriculums and subject leaders are writing new curriculum plans. This is leading to pupils developing a wider body of subject knowledge in these areas.

Even so, you and other senior leaders have accurately identified that there remain differences in the quality and effectiveness of some subject curriculum plans across the school. Where this is the case, curriculum plans do not identify the exact knowledge that leaders want pupils to know and remember. As a result, teachers do not always choose the best activities to help pupils, including those pupils with SEND, to learn new knowledge. This affects how well pupils progress through some curriculums. Nevertheless, the pupils whom I spoke with were positive about the changes that you have made to the curriculum.

Subject leaders are also taking additional steps to check on the quality of the delivery of the curriculum. The findings from subject leaders' checks enable teachers to continue to make ongoing adjustments to their subject plans. These include any changes required due to missed or forgotten learning as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

You have given reading a higher profile across the school to promote a love of reading among pupils. You have implemented a system to identify those pupils who do not read as accurately and fluently as they should. Despite this, you know that some staff are not sufficiently trained to identify the specific weaknesses in some pupils' reading knowledge. This means that not all of these pupils benefit from the support that they need to help them catch up quickly with their reading. You explained that you have plans in place to improve the quality of information that staff receive about deficits in pupils' reading knowledge. However, you are still at an early stage of putting these plans into practice.

Pupils told me that behaviour in their lessons allows them to learn well. They are positive about the changes that you and other staff have made to improve behaviour and learning. They are appreciative of the help and support that teachers provide.

Additional support

The local authority knows the school very well. It has made available a consultant to provide bespoke support with curriculum development. You have made effective use of this consultant to help guide and support subject leaders with their approach to developing subject curriculum plans.

More recently, you have re-engaged with a national leader of education. You have made use of their expertise to help assure you and other senior leaders about the quality of the current curriculum, as well as to help you firm up your next steps for curricular development. In addition, middle leaders value and benefit from the support and guidance that they receive from staff at a local teaching school alliance.

Governors have actively engaged with training and support from external providers. This is helping them to continue to hone their ability to provide you and other leaders with appropriate levels of challenge and support.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders, pupils and representatives of those responsible for governance. I also spoke to your local authority school improvement partner to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited a range of lessons, looked at examples of pupils' work and scrutinised curriculum plans. In addition, I reviewed a range of other documentation, including a selection of external evaluations of the school and the school improvement plan.

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 reports website.

Yours sincerely

Alyson Middlemass
Her Majesty's Inspector