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Tom McDowall
Principal
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Dear Mr McDowall

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pool Hayes Academy

Following my visit to your school on 20 January 2022, 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 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 received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the curriculum at key stage 4 best meets the needs of all pupils
- continue to improve teachers' subject knowledge and lesson delivery so that they are experts in implementing the curriculum in their subject.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection, the school has undergone significant change. You were appointed as principal in June 2021 and the senior leadership team has been reorganised and restructured. A new vice-principal joined the school in January 2020.

Lead practitioners have been appointed in English, Spanish, mathematics, humanities and science to lead on the quality of teaching in those areas. New curriculum leaders have been appointed in English, Spanish and geography. A new special educational needs coordinator has also joined the school.

Main findings

Since the school's last inspection, there have been significant changes in school leadership. This turbulence, alongside the challenges posed by the pandemic, could have derailed leaders' work to improve the school. This has not been the case. Instead, ably supported by the multi-academy trust, leaders have concentrated on the right things. You are getting on with making real changes.

The school is well led. You have brought stability and clarity to the school. You have used the start of term in September 2021 to revisit and reset the school values. Leaders have made sure staff have the knowledge and time to do their jobs effectively. As a result, pupils can see how the school is getting better.

The key stage 3 curriculum provides pupils with a suitably broad range of subjects to study. It is not reduced or narrowed for any pupils. This means that all pupils can choose from a broad range of subjects at key stage 4. You have rightly placed the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) at the heart of the curriculum offer. More pupils are now studying the EBacc and your ambition is for this to grow further.

Currently, all pupils take a qualification in physical education or dance at key stage 4. Leaders' reasons for this are not clear and this is currently under review. The nature of the qualifications means that the time spent by pupils participating in physical activity is reduced. It also limits the breadth of activities in which pupils can develop competence. Some pupils said this meant they could not take the qualifications they wanted.

The school's previous inspection report identified weaknesses in English, Spanish and geography. Leaders have taken action to address this. You have strengthened subject leadership in these subjects. You have utilised expertise from within the multi-academy trust to do this. This has been effective.

Leaders' work to improve the curriculum began in earnest before the pandemic. This continues to be a high priority. Each subject has a 'learning journey' which sets out an overview of the curriculum. Leaders have structured the curriculum so that it is clear exactly what pupils will learn and when they will learn it. Leaders have thought precisely about the order of pupils' learning. For instance, pupils learn how to pronounce words in

Spanish from the beginning of Year 7. Pupils' learning then builds on what they have learned before. In English, for example, pupils build on their prior knowledge of gothic literature when studying 'Jekyll and Hyde'. As a result, pupils make connections in their learning and draw on what they already know.

Leaders have considered how to best help pupils learn in lessons. You have introduced some whole-school learning strategies that all staff follow. For instance, all pupils complete 'do now' activities at the beginning of lessons. Leaders check that the content of these activities helps pupils learn the curriculum.

Since September, leaders have focused on developing teachers' general classroom approaches. As a result, pupils know what to expect in lessons. Leaders' work in helping teachers to be better teachers of their subject is now coming to the fore. This is drawing on strong professional networks from across the multi-academy trust. Leaders know that this work needs to quicken.

Leaders have not been afraid to take difficult decisions to improve the sixth form. Students now choose from an appropriate range of subjects. Leaders have made sure that staff have the knowledge and expertise to teach the qualifications on offer. They have guided students onto the appropriate pathway. Resetting the sixth-form offer in this way has strengthened the provision.

Leaders have prioritised reading, especially at key stage 3. Pupils who need help to improve their phonic knowledge are supported by trained staff. Leaders have restocked the library. Staff encourage and monitor pupils' wider reading at key stage 3. Leaders have introduced initiatives such as '18 by 18'. These aim to encourage older pupils to read more widely. This is a step in the right direction. However, there is more to do.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They expect pupils with SEND to learn the same curriculum as other pupils. Leaders are forward thinking. They are constantly thinking about how they can support teachers to support pupils with SEND.

The school's personal development programme is well thought out. Through 'Pool Hayes learning' lessons, pupils learn about a range of issues. This helps them make informed choices and stay safe. This includes topics such as consent and online safety.

Additional support

The multi-academy trust has been central in leading and supporting curriculum improvements. The support from the trust is extensive. Leaders are keen to draw on the expertise on offer. For instance, leaders and teachers benefit from the 'strategic development groups' and 'teacher network groups'. This gives them the opportunity to talk about curriculum design and teaching in their subject area. They value and appreciate this.

Trustees and members of the local governing board are equally ambitious for the pupils at the school. Each understands its responsibilities in providing scrutiny and challenge to help the school improve. Senior trust staff help tie this together and provide the critical, yet supportive lens that helps leaders focus on the right things.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you throughout the day. I also met with other senior leaders, multi-academy trust representatives, members of the local governing body, staff and pupils to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I also visited lessons and held meetings with subject leaders to discuss curriculum plans. I looked at information on the school's website.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Academy Transformation multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Tustian
Her Majesty's Inspector