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21 September 2017

Mr Iain Turnbull
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Dear Mr Turnbull

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cannock Chase High School

Following my visit to your school on 12 September 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 January 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 January 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- further improve attendance, especially of disadvantaged pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders and seven members of the governing body, including the chair, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated, as were several other documents, including assessment information

and minutes of governing body meetings. Brief visits were made to several lessons with the headteacher.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the school has enjoyed a period of stable staffing. One deputy headteacher has left the school and has not been replaced and a new business manager has joined the staff. There have been several changes to governance, including the appointment of a new chair of governors. Seven new governors have been appointed, including four staff governors.

Main findings

The trajectory of improvement that was already evident at the time of the previous inspection has continued and accelerated in the intervening time. The headteacher, senior and middle leaders and governors are all committed to seeing the school improve. Their improvement plans and actions have had considerable impact.

Standards of achievement at the end of Year 11 improved considerably in 2016. Published performance data for this year contains inaccuracies because of the school's continued use of early entry in some subjects. Leaders believe that this practice benefits pupils and leads to better final results as a consequence. Unvalidated results for 2017 suggest that standards have continued to rise. Improvement is particularly evident in mathematics and science, both highlighted as relative weaknesses at the previous inspection.

Leaders' efforts to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have proved successful. Across a range of subjects, disadvantaged pupils now make progress that is similar to that of other pupils nationally.

Subject leaders form a united and effective team who now lead the development of teaching in their areas. They have been well trained and are effectively supported by senior leaders. They value the help and guidance they receive from their link member of the senior team.

Leaders have thoughtfully reviewed each subject's curriculum plans and assessment arrangements. Plans ensure that pupils progress logically through their learning from Year 7 through to Year 11. Each subject's curriculum is designed to revisit key concepts and content. Assessment is carefully planned to help teachers to check on pupils' understanding. Termly summative assessment also helps to identify pupils who are beginning to fall behind. Teachers then provide extra support to help them catch up.

Leaders carefully quality assure teachers' assessments to check their accuracy. Consequently, teachers' assessments are reliable and their forecasts of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 11 have been accurate in recent years.

Governance has improved since the previous inspection. Following an audit of governors' skills, the governing body recruited additional members with particular expertise in education and finance. Governors now know the school well, including its strengths and weaknesses. They possess the knowledge and expertise to challenge school leaders and hold them to account for the school's performance. Each governor is attached to an aspect of school life, for example safeguarding, standards or careers education. They meet regularly with leaders to discuss these areas and report to the full governing body.

Teaching has continued to improve since the previous inspection. There is a strong degree of consistency across staff in planning, assessment and the use of information about pupils. Training is well focused on areas of need, such as curriculum changes and teachers who need additional support. Teachers regularly share ideas and classroom practice with each other, for example via brief '3by3' presentations to their colleagues. A strong team ethos is evident across the school's staff.

Pupils are polite and respectful. Exemplary attitudes to learning were evident in all classrooms visited during the inspection. However, attendance has fallen since the previous inspection. In the last academic year, attendance was particularly low for disadvantaged pupils and those in Year 11. It was higher for younger pupils. Leaders have rightly made improving attendance a top priority for this year, but it is too soon to see whether their actions are proving successful.

External support

Leaders have drawn upon a variety of external support and training where they have judged it necessary. For example, middle leaders access a number of subject support networks. Many staff are trained as GCSE and A-level examination markers. Teachers attend education conferences and then feed back to colleagues.

The majority of training and development of teachers has been internal, with leaders making effective use of the good practice and expertise that exists within the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector