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Sarah Holmes-Carne
Principal
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Dear Mrs Holmes-Carne

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kenton School

Following my visit to your school on 17 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 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 two 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.

The school should take further action to:

- sustain improvements in pupils' behaviour and attendance and reduce rates of exclusion
- embed curriculum improvements and further check the impact of new plans on pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, there has been a significant restructuring of school leadership. Senior roles have been revised. Three assistant principals have been appointed. A new special educational needs coordinator has taken up post. There have also been changes to trust leadership. A new chief executive officer took up post in September 2019 and a new chair of the trust was appointed in March 2021.

Leaders have continued the school improvement journey over the course of the pandemic. COVID-19 has limited some opportunities to check the impact of improvement actions.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have taken significant action to improve leadership, behaviour and the quality of education. You have restructured your leadership team. New leaders have joined the team, adding increased capacity and expertise. You have focused the improvement journey on a clearer set of priorities. While COVID-19 has affected the nature of the improvement journey, it has not stalled the process. You and your team have shown determination in sustaining improvement in the context of the pandemic.

These improvements have involved some difficult processes. In the period immediately following the previous inspection, concerns persisted over achievement and behaviour. You subsequently commissioned a review of behaviour. This stressed the need for significant action. Your team introduced revised behaviour systems, outlining incremental responses to poor behaviour. Alongside support for pupils, the consequences for unacceptable behaviour were made clear. The early stages of this policy saw a marked increase in exclusion for poor behaviour. This was particularly so for the use of permanent exclusion. This was a concern. However, the past 18 months have shown a marked reduction in the use of permanent exclusion. No pupils have received this sanction this term.

Your team has secured marked improvements in behaviour and attitudes. You have heightened supervision across the school. You and your team are visible at the start and end of the school day. Corridors and social areas are orderly and well-supervised. Pupils feel safer as a result. You have used the safer practices brought in by COVID-19 to sustain a focus on behaviour and safety. In discussion, pupils said behaviour has much improved. Pupils are now mindful of the consequences of their actions. External improvement partners have noticed a transformation in behaviour since the previous inspection. The parents and primary school partners I talked to reinforced this picture of improvement.

You and your team continue to work closely with partners to build wider improvement. Your team is represented on a number of local authority working parties. These include groups exploring better curriculum transition from primary to secondary school. Your

primary partners talked positively about your work in this area. You are also working with the local authority on an initiative to support younger pupils at risk of exclusion.

Your team has strengthened processes to improve attendance. Your pastoral and attendance teams are working more closely to support pupils. Over the pandemic, you have built better links with the families of pupils at risk of absence. An external company is bringing extra capacity to your attendance team. It is difficult to measure the effect of these actions when the wider picture of attendance has been so disrupted by COVID-19. There are signs that stronger systems are helping school attendance withstand the pressures brought by COVID-19. Rates of persistent absence are falling. The latest school attendance figures are in line with those currently seen nationally.

You have worked with external partners to improve the curriculum. Senior leaders have provided a template that is bringing consistency to curriculum planning. There is a renewed focus on the knowledge and skills that pupils will acquire over time. Pupils talked about the Kenton Learning Cycle. They could describe how new approaches are helping them to remember more over time.

In mathematics, leaders have revised the key stage 3 curriculum. They have brought in a new programme that reflects approaches followed in local primary schools. In geography and history, leaders have reviewed the knowledge that pupils need to learn by the end of key stage 3. In English and French, leaders shared examples of how they are building the curriculum over time. Subject leaders have built improvements through work with other schools and subject specialists.

The pupils I talked to felt more confident in their studies. They believe new approaches are bringing more focus to the curriculum. They said teachers involve all pupils in responses to questions. These 'cold calling' questions keep them on task. Pupils also said that 'retrieval' tasks at the start of lessons were helping them to recall important ideas. Pupils described a consistency in teachers' approaches that was not there previously.

Your chief executive officer has made regular visits to check on the consistency of new routines. Your external improvement partner has maintained contact. Some curriculum developments remain relatively new. It is too early to fully assess the effect of the actions your team has taken.

The chair of trustees and the chair of the governing body know the school well. They have strengthened layers of accountability. An external adviser provides additional oversight of improvement work. Trustees have worked to ensure financial stability and a sustainable path for improvement.

Additional support

You and your team have worked closely with a national leader of education as part of the Department for Education's ONE Vision programme. Through this work, you have

reviewed behaviour policies and procedures. This partnership has been influential in the changes made to your behaviour policy.

This partnership has also supported your actions to improve the curriculum. Senior leaders have worked with colleagues from other schools to review curriculum planning. Subject leaders have visited other schools to explore the curriculum in their areas. When COVID-19 restricted external visits, subject leaders used online access to subject specialists and resources to enhance expertise.

You have also worked closely with primary colleagues to improve transition from primary to secondary school.

You, along with members of your team, are actively working with local authority working parties to enhance inclusion, transition and achievement across the city.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and senior leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Kenton Schools Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector