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29 April 2019

Mr Peter Gaul
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gaul

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to King's Leadership Academy Hawthornes

Following my visit to your school on 2 April 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 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. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in September 2017, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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

The school should take further action to:

- Further reduce variability in the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment, by ensuring that:
 - the curriculum is thoughtfully planned so that pupils access a broad and demanding range of content in all subjects and at both key stages
 - teachers carefully sequence learning, so that pupils learn well and progressively build their knowledge, understanding and skills in each subject and across the curriculum
 - teaching caters effectively for the diverse needs of the large number of pupils who join the school at times other than at the start of Year 7.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Great Schools Trust, representatives of the local governing body, a group of pupils, a group of middle leaders and the chair of trustees. At these meetings, we discussed the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and self-evaluation document were evaluated. A series of learning walks were undertaken with the headteacher. The inspector scrutinised a sample of pupils' work alongside a senior leader. A range of documentation relating to school improvement was also considered.

Context

Since the previous inspection, one member of the senior leadership team has left the school. Three middle leaders have joined senior leadership as part of an extended senior leadership team. A number of teachers have left the school since the previous inspection, including two teachers of science and a teacher of history. A number of new teachers have joined the school, including a Teach First graduate. The leader who is responsible for technology and applied learning now oversees the science department.

The school has continued to admit a large number of pupils at times other than at the beginning of Year 7. Almost half of the pupils currently in Year 10 and Year 11 did not join the school straight from primary school. Many new arrivals have joined the school from overseas since the previous inspection. This has greatly increased the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. It has also significantly increased the cultural and ethnic diversity of the school's population. In particular, a large number of pupils have joined the school from Syria.

Main findings

Leaders, governors and trustees share an unswerving commitment to improve the school. They share a balanced and accurate view of what has improved and what further improvements are needed. Their actions have led to a wide range of improvements. However, they do not underestimate the scale of the challenge still facing the school and are totally realistic about its current position. The school is improving at pace. However, a number of significant challenges remain. In particular, the effectiveness of teaching remains too variable between and within subjects, and for different groups of pupils. The quality of the school's curriculum, although improved, does not help pupils to learn as effectively as they could. Leaders have devised appropriate plans to address these weaknesses over the next few months.

Trustees, including the CEO, closely oversee the school's work and its response to the findings of the last inspection. They are wholehearted in their support of the

school and are rigorous in the challenge that they provide to leaders. Trustees work closely with members of the local governing body to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to be able to hold leaders to account. Trustees and governors share a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the school's context. They are determined that challenges, such as the high proportion of pupils who continue to join the school at times other than at the beginning of Year 7, are not used as excuses for weaknesses in pupils' outcomes. Together with leaders, the trustees and governors are determined that every pupil receives a high-quality education and makes impressive progress, both academic and personal, irrespective of their background.

The school's values have underpinned the improvements that have been made across the school. The 'ASPIRE' (achievement and aspiration, self-awareness, professionalism, integrity, respect and endeavour) ethos is embraced enthusiastically by all members of the community. Pupils told the inspector that these values are 'more than buzz words' and provide them with values which, if followed, enable them to become 'better people'. Staff and governors are equally positive about the impact of the school's values and the strong sense of moral purpose that pervades the school's work. They explained how the school's values help them to make clear decisions about what actions should be taken to improve the school. The school's highly inclusive, welcoming and ambitious culture reflects these values.

On balance, the school has responded positively to the priorities that were identified at the last inspection. A great deal of teaching has become more effective as a result of the actions taken by leaders. Some of the evidence from learning walks and pupils' work indicates that pupils often benefit from teachers carefully sequencing new learning. Where this is the case, pupils build their knowledge, understanding and skills progressively and access increasingly demanding work. As a result, pupils are able to apply their learning fluently. These traits are increasingly evident in the teaching of English and mathematics. Teachers also pay close attention to the development of pupils' vocabulary. They provide pupils with routine opportunities to address misconceptions that are highlighted as a result of regular assessment. Teaching is therefore typically more responsive to what pupils already know and can do than it was in the past.

Despite this, the effectiveness of teaching varies significantly between and within subjects. In particular, teaching is less effective in science and in the humanities in key stage 3. Leaders have taken action to improve the curriculum. However, there are still limitations to the curriculum that prevent pupils from accessing a broad and demanding body of knowledge and developing subject-specific skills. For example, the key stage 3 history curriculum does not enable pupils to develop a broad and holistic understanding of the past. It also does not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop the skills needed to be an effective historian, such as the ability to evaluate the reliability of evidence or conduct an historical enquiry.

These limitations in the curriculum are compounded by weaknesses in the way that some teachers sequence new learning. At times, teachers give too little thought to the way in which they introduce new knowledge to pupils. As a result, pupils are not consistently taught in a systematic way that requires them to engage with increasingly demanding content. Teachers do not consistently consider the prior knowledge that pupils need to be able to access new content. As a result, pupils often lack the essential knowledge that is required to absorb new content and develop their understanding. This is particularly the case for some pupils who are new to the school.

Teaching is now more purposeful than in the past. This results in little time being wasted during lessons. Despite this, teachers sometimes expect pupils to spend too long completing tasks that contribute little to the advancement of their knowledge, understanding or skills. On other occasions, pupils become confused, because teachers expect them to consider too many things as they are introduced to new content for the first time.

The school has reduced its reliance on non-specialist teachers. Members of the senior leadership team now teach humanities and science in key stage 4. Leaders have also ensured that non-specialists are supported by colleagues from other schools in the trust who teach the same subject. As a result, the effectiveness of teaching from non-specialists has improved. However, these teachers still lack good subject knowledge and an understanding of how to teach these subjects well. Consequently, they do not sequence new learning thoughtfully. Pupils develop a superficial knowledge and understanding of some of the topics that are taught. Teachers do not pay enough attention to developing pupils' subject-specific skills.

In 2018, the performance of Year 11 pupils in external examinations indicated that they had made slightly less progress across the curriculum than their counterparts in the previous year. In particular, the progress of girls declined sharply. All pupils, including the disadvantaged, the most able and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) continued to make weak progress across the curriculum. Despite this, this picture only tells part of the story. Leaders can demonstrate that those pupils who had been at the school since the beginning of Year 7 had made significantly better progress than those who joined the school later. Leaders' information indicates that pupils currently in Year 11 are making slightly better progress than those who left in 2018. Leaders' evidence indicates that the progress of pupils who have been at the school since the start of Year 7 is getting close to historical national averages.

Leaders have been successful in their response to the other areas for improvement that were highlighted at the previous inspection. Leaders have addressed poor attendance with a broad and varied range of strategies. Leaders have promoted the virtues of regular attendance relentlessly. They have rewarded pupils for regular attendance and they have challenged the families of pupils whose children are unnecessarily absent. As a result, pupils' attendance has improved significantly.

Absence has reduced by over three percent, and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has reduced by over 14%. Absence among disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND has also improved. Despite this, rates of absence continue to compare unfavourably to historical national averages.

Pupils' behaviour has also improved markedly since the previous inspection. Rates of fixed-term exclusion have decreased significantly. No pupil has been permanently excluded in the last three years. The school has developed a range of strategies to help pupils to regulate their own behaviour. A cornerstone of the school's work is the promotion of self-awareness. Pupils are supported to acquire the skills that they require to maintain self-control and respect for others. The school continues to admit a large number of pupils who have struggled to behave well in other schools. Upon joining the school, the majority of these pupils behave well and conform to the high expectations of staff.

Leaders have become more established in their roles since the last inspection. They have been supported to develop a range of strategies that enable them to understand what is working well and what is less effective in their areas. This has contributed to the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation. Leaders have developed clear systems that enable them to monitor and evaluate trends in the attendance and behaviour of individuals and groups of pupils. This is helping leaders to formulate precise plans and to take actions that are leading to demonstrable improvement in some areas.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium has been conducted. The review confirms that leaders are discerning in their use of the pupil premium. Leaders have a clear understanding of the potential barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils at the school. Leaders' spending of the additional funds is focused on alleviating these barriers. Leaders can demonstrate that their use of the pupil premium has contributed to the stronger progress being made by disadvantaged pupils, as well as their improved attendance and behaviour.

External support

The school has been supported by other schools from within the Great Schools Trust. For example, a colleague from another school is developing the teaching of geography in key stage 4. Leaders have also worked with colleagues from within the trust to improve the school's approach to developing pupils' vocabulary. The science department has been supported closely by colleagues from other trust schools. The school has also received some external support. The school has commissioned a school improvement officer to support leaders in their development of the wider curriculum and teaching in humanities. This support has helped to improve the overall effectiveness of teaching. However, it has not reduced the significant variability that remains in the quality of teaching within and between subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector