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Mr Andy Cunningham
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cunningham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Lakes School

Following my visit to your school on 7 December 2015, 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 May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, five heads of department, the Chair of the Governing Body and two governors, the school's local authority adviser and the school improvement lead for the South Lakes Federation of Schools to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited classes during lessons, where I spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at their work. I also met with a group of pupils to talk about wider aspects of school. I looked at documents including your self-evaluation, checks on teaching and pupils' progress, planning for school improvement, and procedures for safeguarding and to promote the health and safety of pupils. I looked at your arrangements to support disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

Context

Since the last inspection, seven teachers have left the school and six new teachers have started: two of English, three of mathematics and one of history. Leadership responsibilities have been reorganised.

Main findings

Your revised improvement plans address fully the areas identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection and are well thought through. Plans are the product of staff and governors working together and are indicative of the shared drive for improvement. The actions that are planned are relevant and timely and the roles and responsibilities of all staff are clear. The school's 'dashboard data', that you are using to measure pupils' academic progress, attendance and behaviour, are helpful indicators of the impact actions are having on pupils' outcomes. Your whole-school plan is supplemented effectively with 'rapid improvement plans' for each subject.

Staff and governors show dedication and commitment to getting the school to be a good school as quickly as possible. Staff, pupils and governors who met with me were extremely positive about your leadership. They are pleased to be part of the team taking the school forward and feel that changes are having a positive impact. There is strong teamwork within the school. For example, staff share information about pupils' achievements in order to help individuals make better progress across all subjects and to support their personal development. Pupils say that staff know them well and have their best interests at heart. They feel well cared for and safe.

Your procedures to keep pupils safe meet requirements. Your behaviour and accident logs are detailed, and you ensure that any incidents are followed up. The daily briefings enable staff to share important information about pupils' well-being and make sure they receive support if needed. Health and safety audits carried out by the local authority and internally show that there are no concerns about the safety of the school building.

Provision to support disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those who are vulnerable is currently under review. You have suitable plans in place to ensure a staff member completes the relevant qualifications to lead on these aspects. You have recently drawn together a 'provision map' outlining the support available to help pupils academically and in promoting their emotional and mental health, behaviour and attendance. This is helpful in establishing how pupils can access support and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of staff. It is a recent development but lays foundations to plan for support and check its impact. You are rightly planning for further review of this provision, to make sure it meets the needs of pupils fully.

Governors are well informed about the performance of the school and have high ambition for the school and pupils. They have a full understanding of priorities for improvement, based on their analysis of pupils' progress, information from meetings with heads of department and regular reports on progress. Consequently, they are able to challenge and support leaders effectively. They are aware, for example, that the progress of disadvantaged pupils remains a key priority.

The improvements noted in the last inspection report are continuing and you are tackling the areas for improvement rigorously. The establishment of clear expectations for pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in lessons is having a positive impact. Your plans to review the role of the form tutor to ensure someone has oversight of behaviour in different subjects are helpful. I did not see any disruption to learning during my visits to lessons and pupils did not express any concerns.

Staff are keen to learn from best practice within school and through links with other schools. They welcome opportunities for professional development, including learning from each other. The guidelines you have produced to support effective marking, improve questioning in lessons and deepen pupils' conceptual understanding are helpful. The whole-school focus on promoting pupils' literacy skills across all subjects is proving successful for staff and pupils. Staff are also positive about the consistent expectations that have been set for the presentation of pupils' work.

Leaders across the school are checking pupils' progress and the quality of teaching carefully. You have revised your approach to monitoring to include more robust analysis of pupils' progress and to take account of pupils' views. The regular checks on pupils' progress within each subject mean that pupils who are not making at least expected progress can be supported early. Your decision to focus observations of teaching on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection is proving effective. This approach provides a useful measure of the impact of the improvement plans and also ensures that all staff are working towards current priorities. Subject leadership is developing well, with senior leaders working alongside heads of department to share best practice and quality assure assessments.

The changes you have made are starting to make a difference. Pupils know that the expectations for their work and behaviour are consistently high across all subjects. In the classes I visited, pupils were concentrating on their work, they listened attentively and collaborated well in small-group activities. Those I spoke to said they enjoy learning and feel that they receive good support from teachers. Attendance is improving with closer monitoring and support for families and pupils.

There is still work to do in promoting the most effective practice across the school and ensuring that all pupils make the best possible progress, but there are firm foundations on which to build. You are aware of aspects of the school's work that

require further development, for example in promoting pupils' understanding of cultural diversity and preparing them for life in modern Britain. The school is well placed to secure further improvements based on effective planning, strong teamwork and drive for improvement from all staff and governors.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school is drawing effectively on external support. Local authority advisers and system leaders in the South Lakes Federation are working together effectively to ensure support and challenge are joined up. Links with Kirby Kendal and Appleby Grammar schools support the sharing of best practice.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law
Her Majesty's Inspector