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Mr John McHenry
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McHenry

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Boston Grammar School

Following my visit to your school on 11 December 2019, 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 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.

Senior leaders and governors 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:

- continually monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and administration to ensure that they are in line with 'Keeping children safe in education' (2019).

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead. I met with members of the governing

body, including the chair and the vice-chair. I also met with a group of subject leaders.

I visited a small number of lessons, jointly with an assistant headteacher, where I spoke informally with some pupils about their learning and checked work in their books. I met with a group of pupils in Years 10 and 11 to discuss their experiences in school.

I scrutinised documents, including senior leaders' evaluations of the school's work and their plans to improve the school. I considered information about leaders' use of the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. I also reviewed information relating to pupils' attendance. I examined policies on the school's website and recent minutes relating to the school's governance.

I reviewed leaders' checks on the suitability of staff to work with children and a small sample of pupils' safeguarding records.

Context

Since the school's previous inspection, governors have appointed a new assistant headteacher with responsibility for teaching and learning. Also, new subject leaders have taken over the responsibility for science and for business studies.

The number of pupils on the school's roll has grown noticeably in the past two years, including in the sixth form. As a result, you have increased the number of senior leaders. In January 2019, an additional assistant headteacher joined the team to oversee pupils' welfare and the provision for disadvantaged pupils.

Main findings

Leaders have acted promptly to improve the quality of education. They have reviewed the curriculum to make sure that it is ambitious for all pupils. Most pupils already study a modern foreign language at key stage 4. Leaders have added computing to the range of subjects on offer. They enter many Year 11 pupils for the suite of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate. Leaders and governors are aspirational for pupils and want them to achieve well. However, they know that in 2019 pupils still did not achieve as well as they should have done.

Leaders check the work of subject leaders and that of their subject teams. This is helping to reduce any variations between different subjects. Leaders ensure that subject leaders understand their responsibilities. Subject leaders work closely with their teams to plan and review the curriculum. They make sure that their curriculum plans help pupils learn the right knowledge at the right time. They have also considered how they can widen pupils' experiences of the subject. For instance, the English plans include local events such as the Boston Shakespeare Festival. Subject leaders appreciate the support they get to carry out their roles successfully.

Leaders have raised their expectations of teachers and agreed 10 'golden principles'. These strategies help teachers to plan work that is more demanding for pupils and builds on pupils' previous knowledge. Pupils I spoke with said they enjoyed it when teachers challenged them. They also told me that teachers sometimes spent too much time on work that they already knew, rather than moving on to the next stage.

Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to develop pupils' vocabulary. Pupils use key subject vocabulary well to explain their ideas. For example, in lessons I visited, Year 8 pupils used scientific terms accurately, such as 'refraction' and 'dispersion'. In Year 9 lessons, pupils identified examples of personification in the book they were reading. These pupils were able to recall what they had learned.

Pupils have opportunities to debate and discuss their views. They are keen to share their own ideas and listen to other pupils' responses. Teachers encourage pupils to reflect on what they have learned and to identify how they can make their work better. However, while some pupils respond to help from teachers about how they can improve their work, not all pupils do.

Leaders make sure that all teachers have plenty of chances to improve their subject knowledge and teaching skills. Teachers like being able to share good practice with others in their subject, as well as in other subject areas, for instance through the 'Friday Forum'. This gives them new ideas to use in their own curriculum planning.

Leaders' work to support disadvantaged pupils is becoming more rigorous. They check their use of extra funding to support these pupils more closely. Governors receive regular updates about leaders' work to improve the achievement of these pupils. They challenge leaders more thoroughly to make sure that all disadvantaged pupils benefit from the additional monies.

Leaders identify disadvantaged pupils who are not doing as well as they might. They work with subject leaders and parents and carers of disadvantaged pupils to find better ways to support these pupils. Some recently introduced strategies are beginning to have an impact. For example, extra support for these pupils in Years 7 and 8 is helping them to improve their reading skills. Disadvantaged pupils who attend breakfast club each day arrive on time to school more often. Leaders' work to improve careers education is helping to raise the aspirations of disadvantaged pupils. Some help for these pupils is still in its early stages.

Leaders track the attendance of disadvantaged pupils closely. They have developed positive relationships with the parents of these pupils. This has helped to improve the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils. However, the overall attendance of these pupils has not improved, including those who are persistently absent. Leaders' actions are not yet having the desired impact.

Pupils feel safe in school. They know how to reduce the risks they may face locally, for example in relation to the use of illegal substances. Staff know how to identify if a pupil is at risk. They are confident that leaders will respond promptly if they have any concerns about a pupil. Leaders involve external agencies when they need help to support pupils and keep them safe. Sometimes, records of leaders' actions to keep pupils safe are not detailed enough.

During my visit, leaders acted quickly to improve some safeguarding procedures. For instance, they made sure that their records of staff recruitment were accurate. They are updating the school's safeguarding policy so that it is in line with statutory guidance.

Leaders' plans for improvement focus on the right priorities. Their actions are leading to positive changes for pupils. Governors know about many aspects of leaders' work. They are getting better at challenging leaders and making sure that they are doing the best they can for pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. However, they do not think about whether leaders are doing enough to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders and governors make sure that any changes they make do not have a negative impact on teachers' workload or well-being.

External support

The school is active in local education partnerships, including the Boston Project, the Lincolnshire Teaching School Alliance and the KYRA Teaching School. Through these networks, senior leaders and subject leaders benefit from sharing ideas with other local leaders. Some leaders have also had extra training to help them to develop their leadership skills so that they are more effective in their roles.

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff
Her Majesty's Inspector