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Mrs Jeanette Saw
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Saw

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Audenshaw School Academy Trust

Following my visit to your school on 26 April 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 February 2016. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve quality assurance procedures through external validation to make sure that leaders' views on the impact of their school improvement work are accurate
- further refine the school improvement plan to:
 - reduce key actions into smaller steps, linked to measurable success criteria that must be met along the way to becoming a good school
 - sharpen the timescales for monitoring activities to make sure that these are done frequently and rigorously

- simplify the presentation of monitoring information for governors, so that they can see clearly which actions are 'on track', and where there are delays, to enable them to hold leaders to account for the pace of improvement.
- review the range of support provided to help pupils to improve their literacy skills and make sure that this is helping them to catch up quickly.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other leaders and representatives from the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met formally with a group of the most able pupils in Year 9 to find out their views about the improvements made in the school. I listened to a group of pupils read who are receiving support to help them with their reading. I was joined by a senior leader in short visits to lessons to look at improvements the school has made to teaching in science and languages. I evaluated the school improvement plan and reviewed a range of documentation, including information on pupils' achievements, attendance and exclusions.

Main findings

Although you were very disappointed in the judgements made in the last inspection, leaders have wasted no time in updating the school improvement plan and planning actions to make sure that the areas for improvement from the previous inspection are tackled.

Achievement in science and in languages is improving because weaknesses in teaching seen at the time of the previous inspection have been tackled and leaders have improved the curriculum in these areas. Leaders are confident that teaching in science is more effective because permanent, specialist teachers have been appointed to replace a series of temporary teachers. Teachers are passionate and enthusiastic for their subject. Older pupils confirm that teaching is much better and, as a result, they enjoy their lessons and want to learn. Pupils have been given more time to study science at key stage 3 to make sure that they have sound foundations upon which to build their knowledge, skills and understanding of scientific processes. Pupils now have the opportunity to learn both French and Spanish in Year 7, before choosing their preferred language to continue with in Year 8.

The curriculum has been reviewed and further changes have been made to improve provision and add further breadth to pupils' experiences. However, pupils say that it is unfair that some pupils have two hours of physical education (PE) each week, but others have only one hour. Pupils do not understand the rationale for this, which has not been explained well enough to them. Leaders are confident that there is no inequality, as pupils affected by the reduction in time for PE all take part in a range of extra-curricular sport, with many representing the school in sports teams.

Leaders have taken action to make sure that learning is appropriately challenging for all pupils, especially the most able. From leaders' monitoring activities, weaknesses in teachers' planning and a slow pace in learning were identified as the main reasons for a lack of challenge in some lessons. Teachers receive support to help them to improve these aspects, such as through collaborative planning with colleagues in the same department. Better teaching and a wide range of activities specifically provided for the most able pupils enable them to be challenged in their learning. Pupils say that there are clubs, such as those for art, design and technology, English and languages, specially designed for them, so that they can develop their skills further. They told me proudly that this is 'by invitation only' or through their teacher's recommendation to attend, because they have demonstrated talent or a strong ability in that subject. For example, pupils acting as language leaders work with pupils in primary schools to help them to develop speaking skills in French and Spanish. Pupils say that although this is challenging, it is fun.

Following the previous inspection, a new marking policy was introduced. This has recently been reviewed and further refined to make sure that marking requirements are manageable for teachers. Pupils explained how teachers now provide 'next steps' for them to carry out following their homework and other tasks. Pupils say that they particularly like the 'next steps' they are given in mathematics and in history, which tell them specifically what they need to do to make better progress, as stated in the area for improvement in the previous inspection report.

Improving teaching, learning and assessment is a priority in the school improvement plan, including for the sixth form. Leaders' accurate review of sixth-form outcomes identified slow progress for students starting Year 12 with low attainment. Personalised guidance is now given to students as they choose their courses, and individual targets are set to help students and form tutors to monitor progress carefully. 'Next steps', in accordance with the whole-school marking policy, make sure that students have areas to improve to deepen their learning. Provision in the sixth form is improving, but not all students take part in work experience.

Leaders introduced a strategy to help the weakest readers to catch up with their reading using phonics. This support is not as effective as it could be, because in 2015/16, only about half of pupils receiving this help actually improved their reading score over the academic year. Leaders now need to consider alternative strategies which may help pupils to make more rapid and accelerated progress in their reading and diminish the difference with their chronological age.

Pupils confirm that behaviour is improving in the school, which supports information provided by leaders that shows a reduction in the number of exclusions. The number of incidents of poor behaviour increased initially, with leaders' raised expectations of standards in behaviour and the improved consistency with which these were applied by all teachers. Behaviour logs show that these incidents are now reducing, as expectations become embedded and teachers become more

confident in managing behaviour in their classrooms. Pupils say that there are fewer lessons than in the past that are disrupted due to pupils calling out. New teachers are well supported when they start in the school. A whole day of induction activities introduces them to the school's policies, procedures and expectations. Leaders make sure that if any new teachers have any concerns, these are tackled.

Following a review of governance, recommendations were made to improve governors' effectiveness. Not all of these recommendations have been implemented, such as the engagement of an external school improvement partner to be involved in your performance management, and to validate quality assurance activities. Following an external review of the use of pupil premium funding, improvements have been made in response, such as further developing systems to support governors in evaluating the impact of this spending. Responses to Parent View are not wholly positive. Governors have not taken action to find out whether these views have changed in response to improvements made in the school. This is because governors do not have a strategy in place to gather and act on the views of parents regularly. Although the school improvement plan identifies key actions to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, it does not facilitate easy monitoring by governors. Not all actions have clearly defined and measurable success criteria or are reviewed regularly enough to enable governors to see which actions are 'on track' or where progress is slow. The school improvement plan is therefore not as useful a document as it could be to enable governors to hold people to account who are responsible for leading the key actions.

External support

The school draws on very little external support. It has used the services of an external consultant in conducting the review of the use of pupil premium funding. A national leader of governance has carried out the review of governance. Teachers work with other schools in the area to externally moderate teachers' assessments in some subjects. Some teachers are markers, working with examination boards, and use their training to support internal moderation activities.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector