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Anthony Martin
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Dear Mr Martin

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Benfield School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 19 June 2024, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust and governors the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited lessons, considered provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), held meetings with staff and pupils, observed social time for pupils and reviewed your improvement plans. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, you have made effective changes to staffing in key areas. For example, a restructured team is now responsible for improving pupils' attendance. You have also added leaders in the SEND department. This is to provide additional capacity to better support pupils with additional needs. Pupils with SEND are now progressing increasingly well through the curriculum. In addition, a new leader responsible for personal, social and health education (PSHE) took up post recently. This has helped you design a new curriculum that is enriched with speakers and visits.

You are building a more ambitious curriculum. This includes developing a structure for implementing learning in the classroom. Your quality assurance, and pupil voice, suggests this is beginning to have an impact. Teaching and assessment are improving. An increasing number of pupils know more, remember more and can do more. You have also prioritised staff training to support pupils with SEND. Staff are more confident about how they should adapt learning for these pupils. This is helped by clear pupil support plans. However, outcomes for pupils in 2023 public examinations were significantly below national averages. You have analysed this information carefully and reflected the findings in your plans. The capacity of the school to support stronger outcomes is improving but pupils in 2023 had less time to benefit from these changes.

Your improvement plans focus on the right areas. A trust-appointed school improvement partner is helping you to put your plans into place. They are also helping you to check that these plans are working effectively. Trustees and governors are supporting you in your work. Trustees have invested in staff to improve key areas such as provision for pupils with SEND and attendance. Members of the governing body are reviewing the impact of your plans regularly. They are doing this through a programme of meetings and link governance. There has been a notable improvement in pupils' attendance. Suspensions have also reduced over time. Behaviour is improving because you have put more timely interventions in place. There is still work to do here, but your strategies are beginning to show signs of traction. You have also started to improve your relationships with the wider community through initiatives such as more focused communication strategies. You have also introduced relational practice. Parent and carer engagement at key school events is increasing. The number of complaints from parents has reduced significantly. Staff increasingly enjoy working at the school. However, some of the milestones to show the impact in your improvement planning could be more ambitious. They do not consistently reflect the aims you articulated in discussion during my visit.

Your improvements to the PSHE curriculum are not as developed as other areas. Some pupils still have gaps in their knowledge and experiences. For example, some pupils have limited understanding about respecting the values and beliefs of others. They lack knowledge about protected characteristics, as well as of different faiths and cultures. However, you have a new curriculum in place which you intend to launch in September. This curriculum will need to address some of the gaps in provision that continue to exist.

With the support of the trust, you have partnered with a school in a neighbouring local authority. This is helping you to develop subject leadership. It is also aiding your approach to improving pupils' outcomes in public examinations. You are working together to improve the quality of PSHE.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the NEAT Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Hannah Millett
His Majesty's Inspector