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Mr Joe Mangan
Headteacher
Alsop High School Technology and Applied Learning Specialist College
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Dear Mr Mangan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Alsop High School Technology and Applied Learning Specialist College

Following my visit to your school on 17 May 2018, 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 that 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.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good. However, the pace of improvements needs to be even quicker.

The school should take further action to:

- give high-ability pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities the same focus as the disadvantaged pupils
- review the manner in which pupils are identified and placed on the SEN register
- reduce the proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities who are persistently absent
- ensure that the development plan is more precise.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school development plan was evaluated, as were other documents and information presented by leaders to demonstrate improvements.

Context

The senior leadership team has been reduced by four, and just over 20 staff have left the school since the last inspection. The governing body has been strengthened by additional members with appropriate expertise and skills. At the time of this inspection, the leadership team was being restructured by governors to ensure that the school's priorities were being led by a senior member of staff.

Main findings

Leaders' actions cover all of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. However, further work is needed to support the school in its journey to become good. The achievement of pupils in 2017 was, once again, well below the national average. These poor results acted as a catalyst for change and a wake-up call to leaders and governors of the need for greater urgency and purpose. Leaders rightly looked to where improvements were evident and shared this good practice to tackle weaker areas. Middle leaders, for example, are an effective part of the improvements being made. These middle leaders have a sound understanding of the priorities for improvement and what needs to be done. Nonetheless, there remain some inconsistencies in leadership.

Leaders have made improvements to the quality of teaching and the curriculum. The monitoring of teaching has identified a clearer picture of strengths and weaker aspects in teaching. Questioning is a common feature in lessons to make pupils think and make links in their learning. Teachers are more confident in planning activities that suitably challenge pupils and give pupils opportunities to express their knowledge in writing. This is most evident in those subjects that pupils are able to choose for themselves. These were also the only subjects where pupils made good progress in 2017. The teaching of modern foreign languages is particularly strong and improvements are evident in science. Pupils that I spoke to readily recognise an improvement in teaching across the curriculum.

Disadvantaged pupils are making better progress but from a very low starting point. Actions are more focused and the leadership of this area has made support for these pupils a top priority for all staff. A thorough review of pupil premium funding has taken place and provided leaders with steps to further enhance the provision. Everyone is clear about the importance of all pupils achieving well, especially those pupils who are disadvantaged. Leaders and governors evaluate the impact of their

work. This is also true for those pupils who need to catch up in their learning. That being said, the school has made less progress in responding to the areas for improvement relating to raising the achievement of the most able pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. I noted some contradictions in the information regarding the progress and attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, and this had not been picked up by leaders. I also shared my concerns about the accuracy of how pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are being identified and placed on the SEN register.

There have been very modest successes in improving the attendance of pupils. You were very clear that much more needs to be done to improve the attendance of all pupils. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities who are persistently absent is of real concern. You shared with me the extensive actions already carried out and what you have already begun to do to tackle this long-standing problem.

Governors commissioned an external review of governance and have accessed appropriate support to enable them to be more challenging of leaders. Governors have an accurate view of the school and sensibly expressed that improvements need to happen at an even quicker pace. The governing body has a range of skills and expertise. To keep themselves focused, they continually ask themselves how their actions will make a difference to pupils.

Governors could be even more effective if the development plan was less dense and more focused. While covering all the areas for improvement identified, the dense text of the school development plan makes it challenging for governors to hold leaders to account in a rigorous and timely manner.

External support

Leaders and governors have sourced a range of external support from the local authority for science, governors, pupil premium and mathematics. A local school is providing support for geography. The school's own information indicates an improvement in these areas. Leaders' processes to assure themselves of the quality of provision have been strengthened.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector