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Mrs V Michael
Executive Headteacher
Morecambe Community High School
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Lancashire
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Dear Mrs Michael

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Morecambe Community High School

Following my visit to your school on 14 November 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, senior and middle leaders, and a group of teachers and governors, including the chair. I also met with representatives from the Bay Learning Trust, who are the school's improvement partner. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I spoke formally with a group of Year 9 and 10 pupils and also spoke informally with some pupils during breaktime. I carried out a learning walk with a senior leader and visited a range of lessons. I also scrutinised a sample of pupils' work. I reviewed a number of documents including the school's information about current pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance, as well as the school's self-evaluation document. I analysed minutes of governing body meetings and records of visits by advisers from the local authority. I discussed safeguarding procedures with you and also checked the school's single central record. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

You were appointed executive headteacher shortly before the previous inspection in January 2018. You are employed by the Bay Learning Trust and are also the headteacher of Carnforth High School. You spend the majority of your time at Morecambe Community High School. Leaders and governors have been working closely with the Bay Learning Trust, which comprises Carnforth High School and Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy.

Since the last inspection, you have worked with governors to formulate a new staffing structure in order to address a budget deficit. A Lancashire local authority recovery plan to manage the deficit is currently in place. Significant staffing changes have taken place. The senior leadership team has been restructured so that there are clearer lines of responsibility and accountability. New appointments include one deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers and five middle leaders. Three subject leaders have been seconded to the senior leadership team in order to develop their leadership skills. Some non-teaching staff have been appointed as pastoral leaders. An experienced director of business and finance has also been appointed. In total, 57 members of staff have left the school and 34 members of staff have joined the school. The school is fully staffed.

There has been an overhaul of the governing body. A new chair and vice-chair have been appointed. Governors are in the final stages of seeking approval from the regional schools commissioner and the Department for Education for the school to join the Bay Learning Trust.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You have established a crystal-clear vision for the school and want pupils to have every chance to succeed in life. Despite the financial pressures on the school you have acted with perseverance and resilience to drive forward a significant number of improvements over a short period of time. The mantra 'a rising tide raises all ships' underpins the work in the school.

You have your finger on the pulse of the school. Actions in your school improvement plan are specific and success criteria are clear. You and your senior leaders now regularly review and evaluate all actions to ensure that these are having a positive impact on improving pupils' outcomes.

When you took over as executive headteacher you recognised that many aspects of the school building were not fit for purpose. You have been working closely with governors and members of the Bay Learning Trust to see what improvements are possible within the financial constraints.

In the past, the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who enter

the school with weak literacy and numeracy skills has not been allocated specifically enough to improve their progress. As a result, these pupils did not do well in 2018. However, you have developed strategies for the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up premium which target funding appropriately. Leaders know the barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. Inspection evidence shows that eligible pupils are doing better than in the past, but it is too early to see the full impact of the new strategies. The section 5 inspection report recommended a review of the use and impact of pupil premium funding. You recognise the need for this and have scheduled it appropriately for early next year when it will be possible to evaluate the new strategies now in operation.

You have successfully strengthened leadership capacity across the school including in the sixth form. Senior and middle leaders are tackling areas for improvement with determination. Middle leaders form a committed team of professionals. They say that they are held to account by senior leaders. You recognise that the skills of middle leaders need to be developed further.

Provisional examination results for 2018 show that Year 11 pupils and students in the sixth form did not do well. This was partly due to a legacy of staff changes, weak teaching and a curriculum which was not suitable. However, during the monitoring inspection there was evidence of improvements to the curriculum, teaching and attendance. Leaders' own information suggests that pupils, including those who are most able in key stage 4 and students in the sixth form, are making better progress than in the past. School data indicates that the differences between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are diminishing. However, you understand that there is more to do in order to ensure that all pupils achieve well.

Staff who spoke with me were positive about the changes that you have made. They say that they are well supported and that staff morale is improving. You have developed a new programme to support the professional development of staff. One teacher commented: 'For the first time, I feel that someone is investing in me.'

The curriculum has been reviewed and revised to ensure that it meets the needs of pupils. You have a clear rationale for condensing the key stage 3 curriculum into two years. Pupils now have access to a wider range of academic and vocational courses in key stage 4. All pupils take at least two sciences and a humanities subject. The most able pupils take a modern foreign language which is optional for other pupils. Pupils are provided with better arrangements for careers advice and guidance so that they can make informed decisions about their options in key stage 4 and in the sixth form.

You recognised that pupils who attended off-site alternative provision last year were failed by programmes that occupied rather than educated them. As a result, these pupils underachieved considerably. You have quickly established an on-site alternative provision called the 'Arc', which provides a suitable curriculum for a small

number of pupils.

You have introduced new assessment systems to track the progress of pupils across the school. This work is being led effectively by the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. Leaders carefully analyse the progress of different groups of pupils. Pupils are given aspirational targets and those who spoke to me said that they understand the system. Leaders have worked closely with schools in the Bay Learning Trust to check that their assessments are accurate. Some middle leaders work with examination boards and use their experience to support internal moderation activities. Staff say that their knowledge of how well pupils are doing is improving because they have access to more accurate information.

Teaching and learning are improving across the school, but you are aware that there is inconsistency across subjects and year groups. You have focused on embedding non-negotiable behaviours and clear routines so that everyone is ready to learn in lessons. The newly appointed assistant headteacher is improving the monitoring and evaluation of teaching. Teachers are starting to use assessment information to plan work that is tailored to pupils' needs. From my short visits to lessons, I saw how teachers used questioning well to identify pupils' misconceptions and to deepen their learning. Most teachers have raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils benefit from consistent routines such as silent starters. In lessons, most pupils behave well and show interest. A review of pupils' work shows that most teachers follow the school's revised assessment policy. Pupils are being provided with more opportunities to develop their literacy skills in different subjects. Leaders are in the early stages of developing more contexts for pupils to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Pupils say that teaching and behaviour have improved. They told me that teachers expect more of them and that there is far less use of supply staff than previously. Pupils were pleased about the changes made to the school day. They said that they now have more time to eat lunch. Pupils and staff say that the one-way system developed in the building has made the corridors calmer at breaktimes.

Your attendance team, led by the newly appointed deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher, is working tenaciously to improve the attendance of pupils and reduce persistent absence. Leaders have raised the profile of the importance of good attendance with pupils. They work more closely with parents to follow up pupils' absences. Leaders have improved the systems to monitor rates of attendance of different groups of pupils and carefully evaluate the impact of their strategies. Leaders use a range of rewards to celebrate good attendance. As a result, pupils' attendance across the school is improving. However, disadvantaged pupils still do not attend as regularly as they should.

There have been significant changes to the membership of the governing body since the last inspection. Governor committees were streamlined following a skills audit. The new chair and vice-chair of governors bring a wide range of knowledge

and experience to their roles. They are ambitious for the school and have a strong understanding of the school's strengths and priorities. Governors provide effective support and challenge to leaders. For example, the chair of governors has supported the executive headteacher with staffing and the vice-chair helped to write the school timetable for the current academic year. Teachers say the timetable has improved their well-being since many now have their own teaching room and there are many fewer split classes. The inspection in January 2018 recommended an external review of governance. This has been delayed to accommodate the changes to the governing body. A review of governance is planned for spring 2019.

The local authority has provided you with effective challenge and support as well as helping you to find ways to address the budget deficit. The Bay Learning Trust has provided some useful support including a review of governance and pupil premium spending before the last inspection. The trust has also supported leaders with improving health and safety arrangements, recruiting high-calibre staff and developing the skills of middle leaders.

In addition to the areas for inspection, I also looked at safeguarding. You have improved safeguarding policies and procedures. Pupils say that they feel safe. Pupils report that there is always someone to go to if they have a problem; they trust staff to sort things out for them.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector