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Mr Mark Davis
Principal
Croft Academy
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Dear Mr Davis

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Croft Academy

Following my visit to your school on 19 July 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 June 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in June 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- continue the current focus on the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils' progress accelerates and they achieve the standards appropriate for their age
- develop local governors' knowledge of their responsibilities and the actions required of them to fulfil their statutory duties.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal and executive principal, a group of Year 6 pupils, three representatives of the local governing body and three representatives from the Elliot Foundation Academies Trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I observed parts of lessons with you and considered the school's self-evaluation and development plan. I also looked at minutes of governors' meetings, your reports to governors, an example of your lesson observations and feedback to teachers, the record of staff training and detailed records of pupils' progress.

Context

Since the last inspection, two teachers have left. You have reorganised leadership and management responsibilities and appointed two additional members of staff.

Main findings

You have successfully overcome many of the long-standing issues facing the school in the lead up to the last inspection. You have kept a clear focus on taking the school forward to address all of the areas for improvement identified by inspectors. You arranged training so that all staff were able to ask pupils more searching, open-ended questions. As a consequence, teachers now check pupils' understanding, challenge their thinking and speedily identify misconceptions or strengths. Teachers' assessments of pupils are increasingly accurate and closely inform their lesson plans. Subject leaders have provided substantial support for staff to ensure lesson plans meet the needs of pupils while addressing sufficient subject breadth.

You have insisted that pupils' mistakes are identified and corrected so that errors do not become embedded in everyday work. Pupils' work in books provides evidence of their significant improvement over the year. They take care to present their work neatly and with pride. All pupils, including those in Year 1, are keen to earn the right to use a pen as a reward for consistently neat work. Pupils' written work shows a good breadth of purposeful writing. They clearly understand what is expected of them and appreciate how they can further improve.

You have provided considerable training for staff in questioning techniques. This focus has helped teachers assess pupils' understanding during any lesson and amend their teaching accordingly. Teachers share the focus of learning at the beginning of each lesson and explain what the pupils are expected to achieve. The planned lessons build incrementally on pupils' previous learning and tasks take account of the pupils' different abilities. Displays in every classroom provide pupils with prompts, reminders or examples, so they are less reliant on adults to complete tasks accurately. Pupils know what is expected of them and they are increasingly confident to check their work and that of others. They are not put off by practising and developing skills because they are determined to improve.

Teachers' assessments of pupils at the end of early years and key stages 1 and 2 were checked within and across the trust to ensure accuracy. You have provided continuous support to ensure that all teachers check pupils' progress regularly and consistently so that help or additional challenge is provided where needed. Your close scrutiny of pupils' progress means that you know individual pupils well and speedily identify those groups that are in danger of falling behind or experience learning difficulties.

You have ensured that staff receive significant training and coaching to improve broad day-to-day practice and then sharpen specific skills as required. Consultants within the trust have worked closely with subject leaders to help them develop the necessary skills to lead and support staff. Subject leaders now work regularly with teachers so that lessons focus sharply on the necessary knowledge and skills appropriate for the pupils' age. You welcomed available expertise from within the trust to help all staff improve pupils' writing skills. You introduced a greater focus on published literature so that pupils can study and learn from a range of different writing styles and purposes. Your focus on reading and literature has encouraged pupils' love of books and further developed their ability to understand and adopt different styles in their writing. Pupils appreciate the school corridors, which are richly decorated with pictures and models of characters and events from published novels.

Together with the executive principal and trust representatives, you conduct forensic analysis of pupils' progress. Staff now fully understand that they are responsible and accountable for the progress made by pupils. Weak teaching in the past has been replaced by a confident and ambitious team of staff who want the best for the pupils. Your checks on teaching and learning are rigorous and frequent. You regularly check on pupils' progress in meetings with teachers and by examining pupils' books. Teachers understand the need for continued improvement and they want to succeed. You are aware of the significant underachievement of pupils in the past but you do not consider or accept excuses for pupils' current standards of attainment. You are acutely aware of the difficulties you face in attaining standards in line with other pupils nationally. Nevertheless, everyone shares a keen ambition for improved outcomes and constantly seeks ways to achieve improved rates of pupils' progress.

You have worked hard to develop the range of subjects taught in school to provide pupils with relevant but enriched learning experiences. You have closely aligned topics with the national curriculum requirements. You have already planned training for the autumn, to ensure that teachers are fully aware of the expected areas of knowledge and progression of skills in any subject.

A national leader of governance has recently begun work with the local governing body. The members are supportive of the school and are keen to be involved in seeking evidence of improvement. Governors are not yet sufficiently knowledgeable

about their responsibilities and the actions they need to take in order to fulfil their statutory roles.

External support

The trust has provided significant support, training and challenge since the last inspection. Representatives with specific and relevant expertise have led training and provided ongoing support to ensure that improvements have been systematically introduced and implemented. A progress partner conducts six visits each year to check on the school's developments against planned improvements. The regional director has provided support for the principal and executive principal so that the school's work continues to identify and focus sharply on the priorities for ongoing improvement. While the trust provides support, members are clear about accountability. They were quick to challenge the school leaders about pupils' test and assessment outcomes when the results were published this month. School principals and trust members are clear about the areas of recent improvements that now require time to embed and become consistent day-to-day practice.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive of the Elliot Foundation Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway

Her Majesty's Inspector