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Mrs Andrea English
Executive Headteacher
Croft Community School
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Dear Mrs English

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Croft Community School

Following my visit to your school on 21 November 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 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that its website is compliant with the government's requirements
- improve the proportion of pupils who attend school every day and decrease the proportion who are persistently absent
- clarify and agree the criteria for admissions with the local authority.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the head of school, subject and shadow subject leaders for English and mathematics, designated safeguarding lead, leader of the school improvement team in Durham local authority and five

governors to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's improvement plans and other documents were evaluated. You accompanied me on a learning walk around the school to look at teaching and learning in classes, together with the progress and standards in pupils' books. I also checked the school's single central record and recruitment processes in respect of staff new to the school since the previous inspection. I reviewed a number of documents including the school's safeguarding policy, staff surveys for 2016/17 and 2017/18, minutes of meetings of the school scrutiny group and notes of the education development partner's visits. I evaluated data in relation to attendance, persistent absence and exclusions.

Context

The substantive headteacher left the school during the spring term 2018. Your support of the school, which was for one day a week initially, increased to two days in the summer term 2018. The school entered into a hard federation on 1 September 2018 and is now one of three schools in the North and South West Durham Learning Federation. The federation has one governing body. The vast majority of Croft's governors became governors of the federation. You, in consultation with governors and staff, remodelled the school's workforce and developed new job specifications for all staff. In addition, you established formal performance management systems and procedures across the school.

Main findings

You, as executive headteacher, provide exceptionally strong leadership in the school. Your very high standards, expectations and practices are mirrored by the head of school. Staff, parents and pupils appreciate the improvements that senior leaders have made over a very short period of time. For example, all have noticed that pupils' behaviour is much improved. The school's data shows that the number of behavioural incidents and fixed-term exclusions is reducing. However, pupils still do not attend school often enough.

You and your team have empowered subject leaders. Their individual improvement plans outline the correct priorities for development, together with the targets and timescales by which improvement can be measured. These subject improvement plans align with whole-school improvement plans. Governors, whose areas of responsibility have recently been agreed and implemented, are beginning to evaluate the progress the school is making against targets in subject leaders' plans.

You have established rigorous performance management systems and procedures, including mid-year performance management reviews. All staff are aware of their targets and appreciate the clarity of leaders' expectations. The results of the staff surveys that took place in November 2017 and 2018 show the proportion of staff who feel the school is well led and managed has increased by 75%, from 15% to 90%. Staff morale is high in this school that requires improvement. Staff told me

that they work very hard and that their work/life balance is improving as new systems and procedures become embedded throughout the school.

You have led a sea change in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment at Croft Community School.

You and your team have established secure baseline assessments for every pupil in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, 'progression' documents for the vast majority of subjects have been implemented. Teachers now assess pupils' achievements against statements in the progression documents and identify the steps that pupils need to take next. Consequently, the quality of teaching is strengthening because teachers' planning for pupils' learning is based on accurate assessments. Leaders are now able to evaluate the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, accurately and incisively. As a result, pupils are beginning to make more rapid progress.

Your information and technology technician has overseen the installation of many new computers and tablet computers in school. This hardware supports the school's new reading and phonics schemes of work well. Work now needs to be done on the school's website which, currently, does not meet the government's requirements.

External support

Durham local authority brokered your support for the school and the school's admission into the hard federation in a timely manner. The local authority has committed additional and substantial funding, over a two-year period, to support the development of leadership and management and to improve the supply of teaching resources. In addition, the local authority has agreed to review the admissions procedures with the school so that pupils are always placed appropriately and according to their prime special educational need. The education development partner from the local authority visits the school regularly and provides support and challenge effectively. The local authority is supporting the school well.

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

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector