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Paul Edgerton
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Dear Mr Edgerton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Croft Academy

Following my visit to your school on 8 July 2019, 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and the trust 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:

- continue to build on the improvements made so that pupils continue to make strong progress
- continue to develop an aspirational curriculum that enables pupils to acquire knowledge and skills across a wide range of subjects
- work closely with parents to improve levels of attendance further.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive principal, principal, assistant principal, a representative of the Elliot Foundation Academies Trust and the chair of the local governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with a group of pupils and, together, we discussed work in their

books. I observed parts of lessons jointly with senior leaders. Together with the principal and assistant principal, I reviewed a range of pupils' literacy and mathematics books. I also reviewed minutes of meetings and the school development plan, and discussed the impact that teaching is having on learning.

Context

Since the last inspection, the principal and assistant principal have been appointed. A lead practitioner has joined the school to support the improvement in teaching and learning. Leaders have managed staff absences effectively, ensuring as much continuity for pupils as possible.

Main findings

Leaders have continued to build on the improvements noted at the last inspection. You have ensured that the strong vision of good and better outcomes for all pupils is embedded and shared by all staff. This is key in driving the improvements necessary to ensure that the school is judged good at its next inspection. An aspirational culture has been created across the school, which is evident in both the learning environment and in the quality of teaching. 'Every one of us, getting better every day' is the firm belief of all leaders across the school. You have raised expectations and are developing a reflective staff team who are committed to ensuring that every child can succeed.

The consistency in the quality of teaching has improved as a result of effective training and support from senior leaders. You have rightly focused on developing the teaching of writing and mathematics. Ongoing professional development is provided and staff are engaged in professional discussions about pedagogy. Support from expert teachers is having such a positive impact that you now have staff who can be put forward to be expert teachers themselves, ready to support others in the federation and across the trust. The effectiveness of this training and the impact it has on raising standards is monitored. Staff work closely together in year groups and across the school, which is resulting in greater consistency in the quality of provision.

Assessment systems in school have improved. You ensure that teachers make effective use of both summative and day-to-day assessment information in order to plan learning that meets pupils' needs. Teachers benefit from working alongside colleagues in school and across the federation to check the accuracy of their assessments. Planning for learning takes account of what pupils know and can do already. It ensures that pupils have chance to revise, learn something new, practise and then use their new skills, knowledge and understanding in independent work. The challenge is high for all groups of pupils. Teachers have developed the skills to provide highly effective feedback to pupils while they are learning. This enables teachers to address misconceptions and errors as they occur and prevents pupils from making the same errors over and over again.

Training in mathematics is having a positive impact. Staff now have secure subject knowledge and the confidence to challenge and probe pupils' understanding before moving the learning on. Pupils are explicitly taught key vocabulary, which helps them express themselves clearly. The learning environment has been developed and resources made available to all pupils so that they can learn through concrete and pictorial experiences before moving onto more abstract methods. Pupils are showing a greater determination and resilience to have a go and keep on trying until they find a solution. They respond well to the challenges set.

Progress and attainment in writing have improved and current school assessment information indicates that they are at or above the national average. Opportunities to edit and improve their work are now the norm for all pupils across the school. Pupils confidently reflect on what they have written. They enjoy the range of writing tasks and the high-quality texts on which much of it is based. They talk positively about learning from their mistakes and how to improve their work. Writing has improved as a result of this focus on redrafting, editing and proof reading.

High-quality coaching and ongoing mentoring for all staff are at the heart of the improvements being made. Support from a school within the trust has helped teaching assistants to deepen their knowledge and develop secure skills in how to support pupils more effectively. Attendance at regular staff meetings and ongoing training helps them feel part of the team. Specific work on developing skills in questioning is helping move learning on more quickly as support staff understand how to consolidate and challenge pupils effectively.

You make good use of strengths across the federation to ensure more effective leadership across the whole curriculum. Through the curriculum working party, subject leaders develop the curriculum so that it builds subject knowledge as well as mastery of skills for all pupils over time. You are determined that the curriculum intent, which is to focus on diversity and community, aspirations, and health and well-being, is carefully planned. You acknowledge that this work is ongoing as further refinements are made ready for the new academic year.

The school improvement plan is clearly focused on the most pressing priorities in order to bring about sustainable improvements in the school. Plans have clearly stated actions and timescales for completion. You carefully monitor the impact on pupils' progress and attainment. Leaders state that despite the range of improvements to pupils' achievement, there is still a need to focus on improving further the progress made by all pupils.

Leaders are aware that attendance levels are currently too low. A high number of pupils are also persistently absent. Leaders know that absence from school has a detrimental impact on the progress that pupils make in their learning. Action is taken to support families of children with low attendance. Leaders are working hard to help parents understand why their children should be in school every day. However, plans in place to challenge absence from school more rigorously in order

to improve attendance and thereby increase outcomes for all pupils are not yet having sufficient impact.

Pupils are happy at school and proud of their achievements. During the monitoring visit, they were engaged in their learning and keen to share their work. They talk knowledgeably about what they are learning to do and why. They are aspirational for themselves and their community. Behaviour is good and pupils are polite and well mannered. They demonstrate a very good understanding of equality, saying that at Croft Academy 'you can just be yourself, we don't all have to be the same because everyone is unique and valued for who they are.'

External support

The trust has continued to provide significant support and challenge since the last inspection. Regular meetings ensure that the actions taken to improve the school are appropriate, timely and purposeful. Support to improve the quality of teaching has been provided by expert staff from other schools within the trust. External support has also been sought to ensure the rigour and objectivity of evaluation. Lines of accountability are explicit and clearly understood by school leaders, governors and members of the trust.

I am copying this letter to the executive board, and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy 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

Nicola Harwood
Her Majesty's Inspector