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Miss Gemma Down  
Croft Academy  
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Dear Miss Down

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Croft Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 26 May 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

### **Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.**

The school should take further action to:

- check that all subject curriculum plans are sequenced appropriately so that pupils can build on previous learning
- ensure that teachers develop their subject knowledge across the wider curriculum.

## **Context**

During the autumn term 2020, several COVID-19 positive cases meant that every class had at least one period of self-isolation. You also had a small number of staff who had to shield at home during this period. Since all pupils returned to school in March 2021, attendance has been slightly lower than where you would expect it to be.

Over the last year, leaders have been able to continue with staff professional development and strengthen links across the federation. Some aspects of wider curriculum implementation have been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Main findings**

You and your leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Some of your development plans have been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, but you have been able to continue with most aspects of school improvement. Work to improve reading, writing and mathematics is bringing about success. You recognise that there is still more to be done to improve the quality of the wider curriculum.

Leaders have ensured that staff receive regular professional development to improve their classroom teaching. Your programme of training has focused on early reading, retrieval practice and support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have also introduced subject-specific training so that teachers have a better understanding of the school's curriculum. However, you recognise that further training is needed to help improve teachers' subject knowledge in subjects across the wider curriculum.

Leaders have a strong understanding of the local community and are acutely aware of the challenges pupils face. Curriculum values of 'raise aspirations, improve health and celebrate diversity' are reflected in some of the school's subject plans. Leaders have made strong connections to their curriculum values in history and geography, and further links are also developing in subjects such as science.

Improving early reading has been a priority since the last inspection. All staff have been fully trained in the school's phonics programme so that they can support pupils at all stages of their reading development. Leaders have also worked with teachers to put in place coaching and team-teaching to model the effective teaching of phonics. Daily phonics lessons are delivered in a structured way, and children and pupils develop their reading skills right from the early years. Leaders ensure that pupils are only given books which match the sounds they have been taught. Regular checks on pupils' phonic knowledge ensure that teachers quickly identify those pupils who need additional support. Additional sessions are then sharply focused to ensure children can keep up with their peers. Teachers are also keen to promote a

love of reading. Pupils talk proudly about the books they read in class and how they read regularly at home. This work has led to improvements in reading.

There have also been improvements in the mathematics curriculum. Leaders have worked across the federation to build a curriculum which helps pupils to know and remember more. Leaders have provided mathematics training with a particular focus on retrieval and recall. Teachers ensure that pupils have weekly opportunities to apply their knowledge in reasoning and problem-solving tasks. Pupils were keen to share their enjoyment of mathematics and the progress they are making.

Leaders have already taken action to improve the wider curriculum since the previous monitoring inspection. For example, in languages, leaders have worked with other schools in the federation to develop plans for pupils to learn Spanish. Pupils have already started to learn Spanish, and you plan to strengthen the teaching of this subject from September 2021. In design and technology (DT), leaders have developed curriculum plans for cooking and nutrition that outline what pupils should know and remember by the end of each year. Leaders recognise that further work is needed in DT to improve pupils' knowledge of planning and evaluation.

In art and music, curriculum plans are still at an early stage of development. Leaders have purchased published schemes to help support in the delivery of these subjects. These are providing a useful starting point for subject planning. Teachers have found music difficult to deliver during the recent periods when schools were only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions. Your current plans in art fit around the delivery of the history curriculum. You are aware that further work is needed to sequence and adapt art and music plans effectively to ensure pupils know and remember more in the long term.

Leaders have considered how the history curriculum should be delivered. Topics have been mapped for each term which cover the requirements of the national curriculum. Leaders are keen that pupils should study an aspect of the Second World War each year as an important historical event. However, at this stage, it is not clear how the sequencing of topics helps pupils to build historical knowledge over time.

### **Additional support**

The trust has put in place effective support systems for the school. The 'Team Around the Academy' meets regularly with school leaders to provide suitable support and challenge. School leaders have benefited from the team's work around curriculum development and improving the quality of leadership. Trust leaders are ensuring that school leaders have the capacity to drive improvement. However, trust leaders also ensure that school leaders can use the internal support provided by the academy team when needed.

Since the last inspection, the school has received external support from an early reading specialist. Support for the school has also included phonics training for all staff. The school has had specialist support from a teacher in another primary school in the trust.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, pupils and those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I also looked at curriculum plans and information on the school's website. I evaluated responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 13 free-text responses, and 21 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Elliot Foundation multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Howes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**