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Gareth Ivett
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ivett

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Daventry Hill School

Following my visit with Dave Gilkerson, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 15 and 16 June 2021, 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 June 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

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

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

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Creating Tomorrow Multi Academy

Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Watkins
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 15 to 16 June 2021

Context

All pupils and staff returned when schools opened for all pupils in March 2021.

Some aspects of school improvement have been slightly delayed due to the impact of COVID-19. However, leaders emphasised that their determination to drive improvement remains unchanged. Until recently, governors have carried out their monitoring checks remotely.

All pupils who attend this school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in leadership and staffing. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and a number of other leaders, staff and governors have all been appointed over the past two years.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Leaders, governors and the trust are united in their ambition for all pupils and for the curriculum. This is expressed through the school's aim for pupils to become 'happy, successful adults'. The well-developed post-16 curriculum and the whole-school focus on employability have become key strengths of the school.

Leaders have completely rewritten the school's curriculum in all subjects and in all areas since the last inspection. This work is almost complete. The curriculum consists of a blend of adapted national curriculum subjects and three curriculum pathways. Leaders and staff recognise that communication is a key strand of the curriculum and is a prime focus for all pupils. This approach ensures that each child or young person receives education tailored to their individual needs.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the curriculum for reading and mathematics. Leaders' actions have resulted in improvements in both areas. They have established a systematic programme to support the teaching of early reading and phonics. All staff in the early years and primary phase have received training to deliver the programme. During the inspection, I observed pupils taking part in phonics groups and reading to an adult. All pupils showed enjoyment of reading and pride in their achievements. The adults consistently encouraged pupils to apply their phonics knowledge when reading unfamiliar words. Pupils read from books that were well matched to their needs and are developing as confident, accurate readers.

Leaders recognise that the next step is to extend this successful approach to pupils in the secondary phase of the school who are still in the early stages of learning to

read. Leaders are in the process of training staff and purchasing resources to support older readers.

In mathematics, well-sequenced plans provide guidance for teachers regarding what they should teach each term. However, the plans do not set out in enough detail what pupils should know. Lessons sometimes lack a clear focus. Leaders and staff currently focus too much on the skills they wish pupils to acquire, at the expense of secure, basic knowledge. Consequently, pupils struggle to know and remember more over time.

Across a wider range of subjects, leaders are in the process of ensuring that the key knowledge and skills are mapped out. For example, in science, history and geography, pupils learn through 'wow' days, practical activities, themes and stories. Senior and subject leaders are working together to coordinate this approach, so that it is clear what pupils should know, and when.

Staff in the early years support children well through their consistently calm and purposeful approach. I observed all children responding positively to well-established routines. They settled happily to each new activity, without fuss or delay. Staff closely match the learning to pupils' needs. This means that children have made a strong start in early reading and mathematics. They are well prepared for the imminent transition to Year 1.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve aspects of behaviour and attendance. Both areas have improved significantly. As a result of renewed training and guidance, staff have become skilled in supporting pupils with severe social, emotional and mental health needs. This has led to a reduction in fixed-term exclusions. Throughout the inspection, pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school was calm and orderly. Pupils of all ages interact with adults, and with each other, happily and politely. Older pupils relish the opportunity to develop flourishing independence and life skills, for example as they run the school's 'Café on the Hill'.

As a result of leaders' actions, overall attendance has improved, and rates of persistent absence have fallen dramatically.

Staff say that leaders support them well. They say that they are proud to work at the school.

The governing body has been reformed since the last inspection. In discussion, governors noted that they have carefully matched the skills of incoming members to the needs of the school. Minutes of meetings show that governors regularly ask probing questions about the quality of education provided for pupils. As a result of these improvements, governors are now well equipped to hold leaders to account for the school's performance.

Leaders' plans for the school's improvement and the scale and success of their work so far demonstrate secure evidence to support strong leadership capacity to ensure the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

Additional support

The multi-academy trust has provided continuous support for the school. This has been through brokering external training and support for leaders and staff to improve the curriculum. Training for governors has supported them to better fulfil their strategic role. The chief executive officer meets regularly with the headteacher to review the school's progress towards achieving aspirational targets.

Evidence

We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior and curriculum leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, members of the governing body, and a range of pupils and staff.