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Martin Brook
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Dear Mr Brook

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lipson Co-operative Academy

Following my visit to your school on 23 June 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 two 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.

Context

All pupils have now returned to school, following national lockdowns caused by the pandemic. At the time of the inspection, four members of staff were away because

of COVID-19 and no pupils were self-isolating. There have been no new changes in the membership of the board of trustees or to the leadership team since the last monitoring inspection in March 2021. There are plans in place for the academy to join a multi-academy trust in September 2021.

Year 11 pupils continue to attend so that they can catch up with missed curriculum content caused by the pandemic. Year 13 students have now left the academy.

Main findings

You, and your highly committed senior leadership team, have brought about a positive change in culture at Lipson. Leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils all recognise the academy to be a happier, secure and purposeful place. Your drive to develop staff's practice and their effectiveness has underpinned this rapid change. Consequently, the school is calm, orderly and a safe place for learning. Pupils are showing increasingly improved behaviour in class and around the school. Pupils rightly say they feel safe.

Your evaluations of the school's strengths and weaknesses are accurate. This has enabled you to plan and deliver effective actions to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last full inspection. Your most recent improvement plan is astute and precise. Consequently, staff are focused on doing the right things, in the right order and at the right time.

Staff are proud to be members of the school community. They appreciate that their work-life balance is considered, while their professional development is nurtured. You have capably enabled leaders to flourish in their roles. As a result, leaders at all levels are having a much greater impact on teaching and learning than at the time of the last full inspection.

You have determinedly raised expectations, particularly in curriculum design. You have successfully brought about improvement to the consistency of sequenced planning across the curriculum. You have achieved this through significant investment in developing the knowledge and skills of your middle leaders. Through rigorous support, middle leaders have improved the school's curriculum planning where needed. For example, in subjects such as geography and modern foreign languages, curriculum planning is now much more coherent and logically planned. Pupils identify with these positive changes. They say the improvements have helped them remember knowledge more systematically.

The use of assessment to judge pupils' progress across the curriculum is developing well. Teachers are clearer about what pupils should be taught and when. There are clear systems through which teachers can check learning, provide feedback and allow pupils to improve their work. However, the use of assessment to check that pupils are knowing more and remembering more of the curriculum could be sharper.

This is particularly the case for checking the impact of the curriculum on the learning of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

You have made strides in improving the quality of teaching. Teachers follow your now more rigorous expectations of how learning should be structured and delivered. Useful planning has enabled teachers to deliver learning with greater authority across subjects. Teachers work hard to ensure that lessons are purposeful and promote learning. Pupils with SEND learn alongside their peers and access lessons with increasing effectiveness.

You have sensibly reviewed the curriculum in Year 9. Initially, you made useful adjustments to ensure that pupils' learning remained broad and deep, including when they dropped subjects when they chose their options. You are taking this further with the plan to broaden the curriculum even more for pupils in Years 7 to 9.

You have rightly identified pupils' vocabulary and reading to be key elements to drive improvements in pupils' learning. Teachers often utilise opportunities to explore subject-specific vocabulary in lessons. Pupils respond well to this, showing an increased curiosity about words and their meanings. You have a clear reading strategy. This is leading to pupils having a greater love of reading. It is also allowing you to broaden pupils' vocabulary, as well as expand the range of books they experience and the cultural capital that this brings.

Governance is growing in its effectiveness. Key appointments to the board mean that there are now more trustees with the expertise to challenge and support leaders robustly. Meetings are better organised and effective. Trustees have made strong use of the challenge and support they are given by a national leader of governance. Consequently, trustees understand the strategic role they play for the local community. They have been instrumental in the decision taken to join a multi-academy trust in September 2021.

Additional support

Your use of external support and challenge has accelerated the progress being made in improving the academy. For example, your school improvement partner has supported the development of your middle leaders. This has increased the speed of improvement to the curriculum. You have also been astute in using external support that links to local area priorities. For example, feedback given by the local teaching council praises your approaches to language acquisition and reading.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the senior leadership team, a selection of middle leaders, two representatives of the board of trustees and a group of pupils to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I reviewed the single central register and discussed safeguarding arrangements with the

designated safeguarding lead. I analysed leaders' evaluations of the academy's effectiveness, plans for improvement and reports from those providing external support.

I scrutinised a selection of pupils' work, including some Year 11 evidence that had been prepared for moderation. We visited lessons together, with a particular focus on English, geography and modern foreign languages. I analysed 157 responses to Ofsted Parent View, including 147 free-text responses, and 92 responses to the staff survey.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
Her Majesty's Inspector