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Paul Cooper
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Dear Mr Cooper

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lightcliffe Academy

Following my visit with Michelle Costello, Her Majesty's Inspector, Jean Watt, Her Majesty's Inspector, Dimitris Spiliotis, Ofsted Inspector, and Pritiben Patel, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 23 and 24 June 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the co-chief executive officers of the Abbey Multi-Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Calderdale. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

James Duncan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 June 2021

Context

Since the previous routine monitoring inspection in February 2020, there have been several changes to the senior leadership team. Following the resignation of the previous headteacher, an executive principal was appointed in September 2020. An existing vice-principal was appointed as head of school at the same time. A new vice-principal and a new assistant principal have both joined the school this academic year.

Pupils from Year 11 and Year 13 were not in school at the time of this inspection. Having completed their programmes of study and all associated assessments, they are now being provided with online opportunities to prepare for future education, employment and training. In addition to this, over fifty pupils from Years 7 to 10 were not in school, as they were self-isolating and being educated remotely.

Leaders have taken the decision to close the sixth form. This decision was made before the start of the current academic year. As such, there are currently no Year 12 pupils at the school.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders and those responsible for governance have continued to focus on the areas of improvement needed at this school. Their vision for all pupils to receive a good standard of education is evident. However, some of the views that leaders and governors have about the quality of the school are overly generous. There is also currently a disconnect between the opinions of leaders, of staff and of parents about aspects of the school.

Most staff consider the school to have improved since its last inspection. However, they do not feel fully supported by leaders in managing the behaviour of all pupils. Pupils also have varied views on the current standards of behaviour. During this inspection, the behaviour of pupils was mixed. Many pupils behave well. Others find it difficult to self-regulate, especially when moving between lessons and at unstructured times.

The behaviour on corridors is much more controlled when leaders are around to remind pupils of the school's expectations. This helps ensure the learning environment is calm and purposeful. However, many members of staff told us this support is not routinely available.

The number of exclusions and repeat exclusions is declining. There has also been a reduction in the number of bullying incidents. Yet, some pupils can be disrespectful to staff. A small number of pupils make sexist and homophobic comments. The school has worked with pupils to address this, for example in a recent Year 9

assembly for boys. Despite this, some pupils continue to hear homophobic comments.

Leaders' efforts to improve pupils' behaviour have been impacted by factors linked to the pandemic. Nevertheless, this work now needs to speed up with a sense of urgency.

Leaders act to ensure pupils are safe. However, their safeguarding records do not consistently reflect the extent of actions being taken to support pupils. Leaders are aware of the importance of addressing this. An additional senior leader has recently been recruited. This has been done to ensure the people with responsibility for safeguarding have the time they need to do their jobs consistently effectively.

Leaders are mindful about the importance of pupils' positive well-being. A range of initiatives have been put in place to support pupils with their mental and physical health. The 'nurture room' is proving to be a purposeful place for pupils to be supported in times of need. Several members of staff are trained in mental health first aid. They support pupils in dealing with issues such as anxiety and worry. A new 'character curriculum' has been introduced to help pupils become better prepared for life in modern Britain. This initiative is heavily based on the school's values, such as being healthy, having ambition and acting with equity and respect.

Leaders have continued to develop the school's curriculum. Subject leaders have revised their curriculum plans. They have received support with this from other schools in the trust, and from another multi-academy trust. They talk positively about this support. However, there is variability in the coherence and sequencing of their plans. Some leaders are still unclear about the crucial knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils must remember. They are not always clear about the small steps pupils need to make in order to perform more complex tasks.

Leaders' quality assurance of the curriculum is improving. However, there remains variability in the implementation of the school's curriculum. In some subjects, pupils were unable to recall what they have been taught. Occasionally, this is because of gaps within previous curriculum plans. In some lessons, teachers move on before pupils secure their knowledge. This is particularly the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders of SEND provision have not always had opportunities to review subject leaders' curriculum plans before they are applied in the classroom.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has clear systems in place to identify and assess the needs of pupils with SEND. Teachers are provided with important information on 'pupil passports'. These are designed to help support pupils with SEND in lessons. However, pupils assert that the identified strategies are not used consistently by all teachers. This was the case in some of the lessons we visited. Further monitoring of the provision for pupils with SEND will help address these inconsistencies.

Pupils told us that they are not inspired to read at school. Although leaders have introduced several different reading initiatives, there is not an overarching strategy that links these. This is limiting the impact the various initiatives are having. Some pupils continue to need support in becoming confident readers. Staff who support these pupils with reading do not always have expertise in phonics.

Leaders promote high levels of attendance. They have introduced rewards for pupils whose attendance is high. Pupils appreciate these incentives. Leaders quickly engage with parents and carers when a pupil's attendance starts to decline. However, a significant number of parents and carers considered leaders to be less proactive when they approached the school with their own questions and comments. Leaders are aware of the need to address this.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- There have been improvements to the stability of school leadership. This consistency is allowing improvement strategies to begin to be embedded. Previous instability in leadership has not been conducive to ensuring change happens at the pace it needs to.
- There have been some improvements in levels of attendance. It is important that the strategies to improve pupils' attendance continue. Some pupils still do not attend school as often as they should.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The systems leaders use to monitor and analyse trends in behaviour need to be more effective in helping to identify where their support needs to be focused. Pupils' behaviour is more controlled when leaders are present to support staff with reinforcing expectations.
- Although curriculum plans have been developed, it is still unclear what the most important knowledge and skills are for pupils to learn in each year group. Teachers do not always know exactly which aspects of the curriculum pupils must remember. They do not know which components need to be revisited most regularly.
- Governors' plans to address the concerns that staff raised at the additional monitoring inspection in February 2021 are not happening fast enough. Some of the issues raised by staff at the time have not been addressed. To avoid a deepening rift between leaders and staff, this work needs to quickly gather momentum.

Additional support

Leaders from the Abbey Multi-Academy Trust have supported leaders with their work to develop the curriculum. They have provided training opportunities for staff in several areas of school improvement. School leaders have also been supported to monitor the quality of education being provided.

The school has previously commissioned the support of another multi-academy trust. This support is linked to several areas of school improvement. Leaders continue to benefit from this support.

Evidence

We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive principal, the head of school and other senior leaders, including those with responsibility for safeguarding. We met with several subject leaders, the SENCo, two governors and the co-chief executive officers of the Abbey Multi-Academy Trust. We spoke to members of staff in small groups and on an individual basis.

We spoke to groups of pupils from various year groups and also talked with them during breaktimes and lunchtimes. We spoke to the drivers of several school buses to discuss the conduct and attitude of pupils on the way to and from school. We visited one alternative provision provider.

We visited a range of lessons, jointly with subject leaders. We looked at a small sample of pupils' work. We considered 59 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 37 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire.