

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



27 August 2021

Alastair O'Connor
Principal
Charnwood College
Thorpe Hill
Loughborough
Leicestershire
LE11 4SQ

Dear Mr O'Connor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Charnwood College

Following my visit to your school on 29 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 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school 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:

- ensure teachers check that the curriculum in all subjects enables pupils to remember and recall important knowledge and apply this knowledge in a range of contexts, for example in extended pieces of writing.

Context

The monitoring inspection took place on the school site. The principal attended the inspection remotely. All pupils are being educated on site following the recent national restrictions.

A new assistant principal was appointed in August 2020 with responsibility for the quality of education. A new coordinator for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SENCo) will join the school in September 2021. The school has been part of the David Ross Education Trust (DRET) since April 2015.

Charnwood College is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of pupils receiving support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is similarly above the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education health and care plan (EHCP) is in line with the national average. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.

Main findings

Leaders' actions are transforming the academic culture of the school. Senior leaders present a unified and supportive team. Staff are committed to improving the school. Leaders have the best interests of pupils at the heart of their improvement planning. They have successfully managed the challenges presented by the pandemic, alongside ongoing improvement work.

The reputation of the school in the local community has strengthened. A large majority of parents would recommend the school. As one parent, typical of many, wrote: 'This is a small but caring and supportive school, with highly committed teachers, who really take the trouble to get to know and support each child as an individual.' Pupils say they are happy at school. They recognise the improvements taking place. Staff are similarly positive about leaders' actions. They are proud to work at the school. Morale is high.

The previous inspection asked leaders to address weaknesses in the quality of education. Leaders have reviewed the curriculum to ensure that it remains broad for as long as possible. Subject leaders have redesigned the curriculum in their areas of responsibility. They have made sure that teachers know the important knowledge that pupils need to learn and the order in which it should be taught. This is helping pupils know and remember more in the subjects they study. However, this is not yet consistent across all subjects.

Leaders have used research to inform their curriculum planning and their training for staff. Teachers' subject knowledge has improved. Staff value the professional

learning they have received. Leaders' actions are improving teachers' ability to deliver the curriculum.

Teachers now use their subject knowledge to check how well pupils understand the ideas taught. In a mathematics lesson, for example, pupils spoke in detail about their knowledge of probability before moving on to problem solving. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to 'respond like a scholar', when discussing their ideas. This initiative is not yet well embedded in all subject areas.

Leaders have established clear expectations for how the curriculum is taught. Teachers take into account what pupils know already before introducing new concepts. Pupils are beginning to make links in their learning, which is helping them to know and remember more. Some pupils, however, are too dependent on staff to provide answers rather than 'having a go' themselves. They sometimes lack the knowledge that they need to complete all the tasks they are set.

Leaders have prioritised the teaching of technical subject vocabulary. Learning is planned to take account of what knowledge pupils need to learn and how they learn it. However, this is not consistent across all subjects. In some subjects, pupils are not confident in using subject-specific language to express and discuss their ideas. Pupils are not always able to recall this knowledge, for example when they are required to write at length or explain their learning. For example, in a science lesson about pollination, pupils were enthused by their practical experiment to find out how pollen is dispersed by the wind. However, some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or with SEND, struggled with the written task. Leaders recognise that more work is needed to ensure that teaching in all subjects enables pupils to remember and recall important knowledge more readily.

Leaders have introduced a new reading programme called 'DRET reads'. Dedicated time promotes daily whole-class reading. Leaders have carefully selected a wide range of texts to strengthen pupils' appreciation and love of reading. I observed several pupils contributing to rich discussions about the texts they were reading. Pupils in Year 8 spoke animatedly about the book 'Malala' that they have read in Year 8, for example. This programme is beginning to have a positive impact on the reading ability of all pupils, particularly in Years 7 and 8. Leaders provide extra support for some pupils. For example, small 'learning meetings' for literacy and numeracy enable these pupils to take part in and talk about their learning with greater confidence.

Additional support

Relationships between senior leaders, governors and the trust are positive and effective. All understand the school's local context, its strengths and areas for continued development. Governors and trustees have a good understanding of the quality of education provided by the school.

The trust continues to provide effective support for the school. Trustees and leaders have devised rigorous approaches to checking the quality of education that the school provides. Staff value the professional learning opportunities and support provided by the trust. Subject leaders, in particular, have benefitted from the subject networks.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the principal and other members of the senior leadership team to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with the subject leaders for mathematics and science. I also met with members of the local governing body, including the chair. I met representatives from the trust, including the deputy chief executive officer and regional director. I formally met a small group of pupils from key stage 3. I also spoke informally to pupils in lessons and around the school during lunchtime. I visited eight lessons and looked at a small sample of pupils' work during these visits. I examined a range of documentation, including records relating to leaders' checking of the quality of education and staff training. I scrutinised several curriculum planning documents. The school improvement plan was also evaluated.

I considered 80 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 72 free-text comments. I also reviewed 51 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector