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Louise Baker
Principal
John Madejski Academy
125 Hartland Road
Reading
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Dear Mrs Baker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to John Madejski 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.

The school should take further action to:

- implement a programme to improve pupils' reading and establish a culture of reading in the school
- move pupils to a full computing curriculum as soon as possible
- ensure that teachers identify more consistently the knowledge pupils have learned and what they need to learn next.

Context

Shortly after the last on-site inspection in January 2020, an interim principal joined the school, leading it until you took the substantive post in September 2020. There is a new chair of the governing body and most of the governors are new.

Main findings

You and your leadership team know what needs to be done to improve the school and have set about doing it in a logical and rigorous manner. Your plans to continue your work are well-considered and identify appropriate priorities.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic and periods when the school was only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions, you have made changes that have already benefited pupils. For example, in January this year, you launched a new timetable to give pupils a broader curriculum and include subjects such as technology, careers, and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). Sixth-form students now receive rich support for their personal development and work-related learning.

Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about these changes. They appreciate their weekly PSHE lessons where they learn about and discuss important issues such as prejudice, discrimination, and positive relationships. They enjoy their careers lessons and are fired up with the possibilities for their futures. Most Year 11 and Year 13 pupils have confirmed plans for their next steps. Although these year groups have now left the school, staff are continuing to work with those who have yet to decide on what to do next.

You recognise that not all pupils are as passionate as the ones I spoke with. You have launched the school mantra of 'Join in, be motivated and be ambitious', and there are early signs that it is making a difference. For example, attendance is rising and exclusions have fallen. Over half of the current Year 9 pupils have opted to take GCSE subjects that will lead to the English Baccalaureate, compared with 10% of current Year 10 pupils.

Your focus on the curriculum is improving the overall quality of education for pupils. Staff are committed to the changes, with many learning how to teach additional

subjects so that pupils can have a broad curriculum. Some are using time gained from examination classes leaving to help make up gaps in younger pupils' learning. However, pupils currently study information communication technology (ICT) rather than computing because teachers have identified gaps in pupils' basic ICT skills that will prevent them accessing computing. This potentially limits their choices for the future.

Reading is, rightly, a priority. Your team is currently exploring how to best support pupils whose reading ability hinders their wider learning. You aim to promote a culture of reading throughout the school, recognising there is still much work to do here.

Subject leaders have benefited from leaders' support to improve teaching in their departments. They have more confidence and ability to hold teachers to account and support them to identify clearly the knowledge that pupils have learned and what they need to learn next.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has changed the approach to supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Now, pupils with SEND study all subjects and receive focused additional support that is reviewed frequently to check it is making the intended difference. The SENCo has ensured that they all have individual education plans that set out how staff can best support them. The SENCo has provided extra training for staff so that they can use this information effectively. You, senior leaders and heads of year monitor the effectiveness of this work through your learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work.

Additional support

The school has benefited from support from The White Horse Federation multi-academy trust (MAT) and local schools, particularly to support curriculum development. The MAT subject networks have helped subject leaders to check their knowledge and develop their curriculum areas. You have also valued subject-specific support from local schools for mathematics, textiles and computing.

The secondary director from the MAT visits the school weekly to provide leadership support. The MAT has also supported the local governing body and ensured new governors have all the required training. In turn, governors have provided robust support and challenge to leaders, helping to accelerate the pace of change through their questions.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the principal, other senior leaders, pupils, the chair of the governing body, and the secondary director from the MAT, acting as representative for the trustees, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

The principal and I visited a sample of lessons from every year group. I also considered school improvement plans, minutes from meetings of the local governing body, and checked the single central register. I considered the views of 34 parents through Ofsted's Parent View online survey, including 25 written comments. I also took into account the views of staff through conversations and the 48 responses to the online staff survey.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of The White Horse Federation MAT, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Reading. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector