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Peter Walker
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Dear Mr Walker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Crofton Academy

Following my visit to your school on 6 July 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:

- evaluate whether the new curriculum is leading to pupils knowing more and remembering more of what they learn.

Context

In May 2020, the school joined Castleford Academy Trust. Since the last section 5 inspection in September 2019, you have appointed a business manager. This is a newly created post. You have also appointed two assistant headteachers. These roles have created more capacity to focus on improving behaviour and attendance.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the pace of improvement. However, leaders have taken the opportunity to develop the curriculum. For example, subject leaders have been able to work with colleagues from another trust school to develop and improve curriculum plans.

Main findings

The school improvement plan is sharply focused on the right priorities. Steps have been taken to improve behaviour and attendance and to develop the quality of the curriculum. With support from the trust, there is now more capacity in senior leadership. Leaders have specific roles which focus on behaviour, attendance and the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

From September 2021, there will be more teaching time allocated to key stage 3. Teachers have developed new curriculum plans to deliver the additional knowledge and skills that will be taught in Year 9. These plans are thought through well and are detailed. Subject leaders have carefully considered how knowledge is sequenced so that pupils learn things in a logical order. Teachers benefit from the opportunity to work with colleagues from within the trust. This has strengthened curriculum planning. You acknowledge that it will be important to evaluate the effectiveness of this new curriculum.

Carefully chosen texts in English allow pupils to study a wide range of literature. The curriculum supports pupils to get to know these texts in depth. Teachers have structured the curriculum to support pupils to build expertise in reading, writing and spoken language.

Leaders have taken steps to prioritise reading. Some pupils arrive in Year 7 with weak reading skills. Teachers check how well pupils can read on entry to the school. Some staff are trained to provide specific support for the weakest readers. More time is allocated to reading in English lessons. The school library has been refurbished to support the reading strategy.

The science curriculum is designed around key themes called the 'big ideas'. This helps pupils to connect their learning from one topic to another. Teachers consider carefully how the curriculum in key stage 3 links to what pupils already know from primary school. For example, work in Year 7 on sound and light builds on pupils' knowledge of this topic from primary school. Lessons start with a recap quiz called

'quick six'. Pupils said that this strategy means that they are able to remember more of what they learn.

Staff and pupils said that behaviour has improved. There is more social and emotional support in place for pupils than there was previously. This has contributed to a lower exclusion rate. Pupils and staff understand the new behaviour systems. Parents are less clear on the reasons for some of the changes.

Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have worked effectively with the trust to bring about improvements. There is a high degree of support and challenge for school leaders. Governors acknowledge that most staff can see the improvement in the school, but that there is more work to do to demonstrate this to parents.

Additional support

External support is effective in bringing about improvement at the school. Subject leaders have benefited from curriculum planning within the trust and from local authority subject networks. The trust has provided extra capacity in senior leadership and support for strategic planning and governance.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, governors and members of the trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I also met with pupils and a range of staff, including the designated safeguarding lead. I visited lessons and looked at a range of documents, including curriculum plans and the school improvement plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Carl Sugden
Ofsted Inspector