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10 September 2021

Trevor Scott  
Headteacher  
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West Midlands  
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Dear Mr Scott

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Castlewood School**

Following my visit to your school on 7 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 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. 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:

- refine the processes that leaders use for self-evaluation so that they can accurately identify current strengths and weaknesses, and then plan more precisely for improvement.

## **Context**

The school joined a new multi-academy trust (MAT) in September 2020. At this point, the existing governing body became the local advisory board.

An additional assistant headteacher was appointed in September 2020.

Throughout the national lockdown, the school remained open. Most pupils continued to attend school. For those pupils whose families chose for them not to attend, you provided regular contact and work for the pupils to complete at home.

## **Main findings**

Driven by your focus on meeting the pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and academic progress, you and your team have successfully implemented a range of improvements since the last inspection. You identified rightly that the pandemic would be likely to have a considerable impact on your pupils who already have significant social, emotional and mental health needs. As a result, you prioritised pupils' emotional well-being and personal safety. While the speed of school improvement was to some extent reduced by the pandemic and also the transfer to a new MAT, you continued to address the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Consequently, leadership capacity has improved, the curriculum, including reading, is moving in the right direction, and there is a more consistent approach to behaviour in the school.

Leadership capacity has improved significantly since the last inspection. A new assistant headteacher and a restructuring of the existing leadership team have provided much needed additional staffing to help to improve the school. With this additional staffing capacity, you have established a lower school for pupils from Year 4 to 8 and an upper school for pupils from Year 8 to 11. Staff speak positively of this development. In particular, they feel the school is led well and feel well supported by leaders in meeting the pupils' SEND and developing the curriculum.

While you closely monitor progress, the areas you have identified for improvement in your self-evaluation document and development plan do not always correspond to the work happening in school. For example, the significant amount of work you are completing on developing the curriculum is not reflected in the written plan. Without this accurate documentation of actions and planned actions, it is harder for leaders to keep track of what they have achieved and for others, such as the local advisory board and MAT, to hold all leaders to account. You explained that the focus on the well-being and safety of individual pupils during the pandemic had meant it was difficult to find the time to complete an accurately written self-evaluation and resulting development plan. However, with the MAT support, you have prioritised this for completion over the next few months.

As a result of your immediate action after the last section 5 inspection, there is a new curriculum statement of intent. This was produced with subject leaders and rightly focuses on providing a curriculum that meets pupils' needs and, equally, is academically ambitious. You know that further work is needed to ensure that the knowledge to be taught is identified along with the curriculum themes, skills and topics already in place. Lessons are starting to help pupils to learn and remember more over time, but more work is needed to ensure that the knowledge taught then 'sticks' in the long-term memory of the pupils. Pupils speak positively of their experiences of school but would like more opportunities to study modern foreign languages.

Recent work on phonics has further enhanced the work that you had already started to develop reading. You are using a new reading scheme and phonics programme. All teachers have completed training on this approach. Within the secondary phase of the school, pupils who would have previously struggled with reading are now accessing the essential support they need. You know this needs to be further enhanced by all remaining teaching staff receiving this training as soon as possible. Well-planned guided reading sessions provide pupils with opportunities to understand and respond to questions about the text. While there is a clear plan in place for the books that teachers will read to pupils, the range of different genres, authors and styles of writing remains limited.

Whole-school behaviour management is now more consistent than it was at the last inspection. Since then you have implemented a broad range of training for all staff. This included appropriate training on reducing the need for restrictive physical intervention and some individual training for those staff who wanted to develop their expertise in aspects such as bereavement. Consequently, you are establishing a culture in which leaders and staff aim to understand the reasons for the behaviour, so the right support is in place. One pupil said that the best part of the school was that the staff really listened to them and wanted to understand them. You have identified that since the national lockdowns, the number of fixed-term exclusions has risen. To address this, you have already planned further training for all staff to complete in the autumn term on nurture and responding to trauma, to try to ensure that they have a better understanding of some of the more challenging behaviours that pupils are exhibiting.

### **Additional support**

Since the last inspection, the newly involved MAT has provided a broad range of support for leaders. The MAT has provided access to school improvement services and established links with other schools and leaders in the trust. This comprehensive offer has already started to give the leaders the time they need to develop their self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

You identified that additional support has been sought and gained in helping you develop your curriculum. Whether this was through a national reading organisation

or partnership with local schools, you feel this has helped in developing such aspects as science and reading.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils and staff to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Meetings with the chair of the local advisory board, the school improvement partner and the chief executive officer of the MAT were held remotely.

I visited several lessons, spoke with pupils about their work and reviewed the quality of work in books. I also observed pupils reading to staff and guided reading sessions.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local advisory board, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Manor Hall multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Solihull. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Pollitt  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**