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Christopher Berry
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Dear Mr Berry

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to LWS Academy

Following my visit to your school on 13 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.

Context

Since the last on-site inspection in September 2019, there have been changes to leadership. The headteacher has been appointed to the substantive role. There is a new assistant headteacher and a new chair of trustees.

Main findings

You and your team are sharply focused on school improvement and continue to work through and refine your well-considered improvement plans. You are determined to provide pupils with a broad and balanced education that blends academic ambition with pastoral care. Your school values of 'ready to learn, respectful and responsible' are a useful guide for staff and pupils, and I heard them used well during my visit.

You have not let the pandemic distract you from your focus, although you are aware that it has slowed some of your planned changes. For example, your team has systematically restructured curriculum plans to help teachers to focus on what pupils need to learn and in what order. However, the detail of what knowledge pupils are intended to learn is not consistently set out as you intend it to be. This makes it difficult for leaders to assure themselves of the quality of these plans. Your team recognises this and has already started further refinements.

Leaders responsible for the curriculum have made sure that literacy and numeracy are threaded through all subject areas. You commissioned effective staff training to support this. All subject plans now address these aspects of pupils' learning and teachers are knowledgeable about these aspects of their work.

Leaders' work to communicate pupils' needs has been successful. Teachers and teaching assistants are now confident that they understand the specific needs of each pupil and can adapt their lessons to meet these needs. Staff value the time you all routinely spend discussing pupils' needs and possible approaches.

You have ensured that reading remains a priority for all. The weekly tutor group reading is successfully creating a culture where pupils are keen to listen to and discuss books. Pupils told me that they have surprised themselves in their enjoyment of this activity. They particularly like the ways that staff 'go for it' when reading aloud. Pupils are also very positive about the effectiveness of the new approach you are taking in supporting the weakest readers to improve. The leader responsible for reading has piloted a commercial scheme with this group of pupils. You have, sensibly, recently trained all staff to use this method so that you can strengthen this work throughout the school.

You have seen some improvement to attendance, especially for younger pupils. Leaders are using a wide range of strategies to reduce persistent absence, with some early encouraging signs. You recognise that this remains a priority.

Year 11 pupils have left the school but staff are keeping in touch with them. All pupils have appropriate destination plans for September. Staff intend to support pupils during this transition to ensure that it is successful.

The phase committee, which is responsible for local governance, has provided

support and coaching rather than the required challenge and scrutiny. All at the multi-academy trust (MAT) recognise the need for members of this committee to increase the rigour of their work.

Additional support

You have benefited from the focused support and challenge provided by the officers of GFM Education MAT. The chief executive officer (CEO) has worked closely with you to identify improvement priorities and the best actions to address them. You have also benefited from the strengthened communication and support between schools across the trust.

You appreciate the support from the local authority and various local networks, including those for special schools.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, trust representatives including the CEO, the phase committee responsible for local governance, pupils and teachers to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited some lessons, looked at pupils' work and scrutinised curriculum plans. I considered school improvement plans, minutes from meetings of the phase committee and checked the single central record. I considered the views of parents through the nine responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including four written comments. I also took account of the views of staff through conversations and the 11 responses to the online staff survey.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of GFM Education MAT, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector