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Paul Cooper
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Dear Mr Cooper

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lightcliffe Academy

Following my visit with Shelley Heseltine, Ofsted Inspector (OI), Garry Stout, Ofsted Inspector (OI) and David Mills, Ofsted Inspector (OI) to your school on 30 November and 1 December 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, and the co-chief executive officers of the Abbey multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Calderdale. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

James Duncan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 30 November and 1 December 2021

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in June 2021, a vice-principal has resigned. A new vice-principal, employed by the Abbey multi-academy trust, is now working at the school on a part-time basis. The school's reading leader has also been promoted to the senior leadership team.

The work leaders are doing to improve pupils' attendance is being affected by the pandemic. A small number of staff and pupils were absent or working remotely at the time of this inspection due to the pandemic.

This inspection had a particular focus on the work leaders are doing to improve the quality of education. We also focused on the progress being made to improve pupils' behaviours and attitudes.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Following the previous monitoring inspection, leaders have not delayed in developing the teaching plans in place for many subjects. Plans in English, for example, are now clearer and more precise. Teachers of English are now able to use these plans to help structure their lessons. They are motivating pupils to use extended, rich vocabulary in their written work. As a result, the work that pupils are producing in English lessons is improving.

In subjects including science and mathematics, the work to develop subject plans is also underway. Retrieval activities are being used to help pupils remember the most important topics. Plans in other subjects, such as geography, history and modern foreign languages, are still at an earlier stage of development. As teaching plans improve, leaders are now considering the appropriateness of existing assessments. They are also reviewing the purpose and effectiveness of homework activities. Providing opportunities for pupils to experience the wider world, on trips, visits and by getting visitors into school, are also high priorities for senior and subject leaders.

Leaders are also working to ensure these updated plans are being delivered in lessons. Currently, pupils' engagement in their learning varies between lessons. Pupils engage better when expectations are clear and high. In one drama lesson, for example, pupils were exploring challenging concepts, such as imagining life in a dystopian future. All pupils were enthusiastic about their learning, showing a genuine interest in the work they were doing.

Leaders have improved their record-keeping of incidents of poor behaviour. Most pupils continue to regulate their own behaviour in and out of lessons. Some do not. Incidents of poor pupil behaviour are beginning to reduce over time. The number of pupils coming out of lessons, for example, has declined.

Incidents of low-level disruption continue to occur. Those involved are usually challenged by staff, but not always. A small number of pupils speak over members of staff. Others arrive to lessons late. Occasionally pupils disturb peers in other lessons. Where pupils are not being taught regularly by their usual teachers, there is greater disruption. Some parents are concerned about the frequency of changes to teaching staff in some subjects.

As a result of disruption to education throughout the pandemic, the proportion of pupils studying a broad range of challenging subjects in Year 10 has fallen significantly. Leaders are aware of the need to address this. The strategy to promote reading to all pupils has also been revisited. The vision of leaders is becoming more focused. Work is also underway to improve pupils' oracy skills. All staff have received training in phonics to ensure they can support pupils who are less confident in reading. At this stage it is too early to see the impact of these initiatives.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the same subjects as their peers. Occasionally, however, teachers do not always provide enough support to ensure pupils with SEND make as much progress as they can.

Communication systems between school and home need to improve. A significant number of parents continue to face problems getting the help they need. Parents say that some of the phone calls they make into school are not answered. Some messages and emails are not responded to. The work to address the disconnect between school and parents, as reported previously, needs to accelerate.

Leaders and governors have been more proactive in addressing the concerns raised by members of staff in the previous inspection. A new staff forum has been set up. Anonymous staff surveys are being used. The chair of governors has met several members of staff, individually and in small groups. As a result, leaders and governors now have a handle on the frustrations that staff face. Staff feel much more supported by senior leaders. Almost all staff are proud to work at the school.

The school's 'character curriculum', introduced to support pupils' wider personal development, is gaining momentum. This is important, as some pupils are not yet fully prepared for the qualities expected of adults living in modern Britain. Leaders have identified that pupils need further teaching around dignity and respect. They have plans for this to be a significant focus over the coming term.

Within each value of the 'character curriculum', pupils have opportunities to engage in working groups to address specific projects. Pupils in the dignity group, for example, are currently working on an anti-bullying ambassador programme. This is one of several initiatives aimed at reducing the number of bullying incidents. Concerns about homophobic comments were raised in the previous monitoring inspection report. These issues have continued. Some pupils say they hear inappropriate comments most days.

Leaders are keen to ensure all areas in the school are secure. They have recently commissioned an independent safeguarding audit to help identify where improvements

can be made. Leaders have plans in place to address necessary actions identified from this audit. Some pupils do not feel as safe as they should in the washroom area. At the time of the inspection, most toilet cubicle doors are missing locks, and there is offensive graffiti in this area. Leaders are already addressing these concerns.

The wider culture of safeguarding continues to ensure pupils receive the support they need. The quality of leaders' records and associated analysis is improving. Governors have challenged leaders on this. Governors also continue to contribute effectively to the school's strategy to support disadvantaged and other vulnerable pupils.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement

- The work leaders have done to improve the quality of education has gathered momentum. The school's teaching and learning model has become more embedded. Curriculum plans are improving. Pupils are now starting to benefit from improved experiences in the classroom. Recap tasks are also being used in several subjects to help pupils remember important content.
- There have been improvements to staff morale. Leaders have proactively listened to staff. Their concerns are being addressed. Staff feel more supported by leaders and governors. As such, staff are more committed to working with leaders to improve the school. Staff still consider the increased presence of leaders at unstructured times to be important.
- There have been some improvements to pupil behaviour. Staff speak highly of the renewed focus on this from leaders. The overall number of incidents of poor behaviour has declined. However, leaders are aware that there is still significant work to be done, including addressing low-level disruption in lessons and instances of defiance out of lessons.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement

- Cases of bullying are not falling quickly enough. Further work needs to be done to address the frequency of homophobic comments. The work that has taken place to date has not had the necessary long-term impact.
- Many parents and carers continue to be frustrated with communication between school and home. Some parents struggle to get answers to the questions they raise. Others do not feel fully informed about their child's engagement and progress at school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders, including those in positions of governance and from the multi-academy trust, must, with a sense of urgency, address the concerns raised by pupils about feeling safe when using the toilet facilities in school. The use of homophobic language by some pupils must also be addressed. Leaders must also ensure the actions to improve the safety of the school site are implemented without delay.

Additional support

Support has been provided for leaders from the Abbey multi-academy trust (MAT). A significant amount of this support has focused on improving the quality of education. Leaders from the MAT have also coordinated training for all staff, aimed at improving the management of pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Leaders have also commissioned an external organisation to further improve the behaviour of some disengaged pupils.

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher and head of school. They also met other senior leaders, including those with responsibility for behaviour, safeguarding and SEND. Inspectors also met with a co-chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, and representatives from the local governing body. Inspectors spoke to pupils, on an individual basis and in several small groups.

To evaluate the work being undertaken to improve the quality of education, inspectors reviewed the curriculum in English, mathematics, performing arts and science. As part of this the team met with subject leaders, observed lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke to teachers. A telephone conversation was held with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, in addition to the responses to Ofsted Parent View, the survey for gathering the opinions of parents and carers.