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Dear Mrs Young

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Leighton Academy

Following my visit to your school on 13 May 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:

- support pupils to know and remember more of their learning in subjects other than English and mathematics
- develop the local advisory board's oversight of the wider curriculum so that it can support and challenge your actions to develop the quality of education further.

Context

Staffing and governance have been stable since the most recent section 5 inspection in March 2020.

Main findings

Since the school's previous inspection, you have maintained your drive to improve many aspects of the school's work. You have implemented an appropriate improvement plan. Your actions to date have led to improvements in the reading curriculum. They have also ensured that children in early years are now better prepared for the Year 1 curriculum. These developments have provided a firm foundation for continued improvement.

You have implemented a well-planned reading curriculum and have ensured that staff receive the training they need to deliver this curriculum successfully. Teachers introduce pupils to a wide range of increasingly challenging texts. Pupils are taught the vocabulary they need to understand the books they read and listen to. You and staff work effectively to inspire pupils to read. Your actions have meant that, in key stage 2, pupils are showing a greater love of reading.

You have built on the initial improvements to the early years curriculum noted at the previous inspection. The early years curriculum has been well thought through to meet children's different needs. Classrooms support the curriculum fully. They are rich in opportunities for language and mathematical development. Staff in early years work in close partnership to support children's learning. The special educational needs coordinator supports the families of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. He helps the children to make a successful start in the Nursery and Reception classes. Those children who need extra help are quickly identified and are supported by specialist staff. This means that more children are ready to meet the demands of the Year 1 curriculum.

You have successfully overseen further improvements to curriculum planning in subjects other than English and mathematics. Subject leaders have benefited from external support to develop their curriculum plans. They carefully research any new approaches and resources before introducing them. Curriculum plans in subjects such as science and computing are well sequenced. They set out clearly the knowledge pupils will learn and the order in which it will be taught.

Leaders have resumed their checks on the delivery of the curriculum. This is helping them to understand what pupils know and remember of what has been taught. This has shown that pupils are less able to recall their learning in subjects other than English and mathematics. For example, the pupils whom I spoke with talked animatedly about their current history, geography and science topics, but they struggled to remember what they had learned in previous years. You have discovered that this is because curriculum planning does not provide sufficient

opportunity for pupils to revisit prior learning to make sure that it is embedded in their memories.

Representatives of the local advisory board who spoke with me are kept well informed about the actions that you and other leaders take in order for the school to become good at the next inspection. They are mindful of staff well-being. Staff appreciate the consideration that you and the local advisory board give to their workload. However, members of the local advisory board are not as well equipped to challenge you and other leaders about the quality of the curriculum in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Additional support

You work in close partnership with schools from across the Learning for Life Partnership multi-academy trust (MAT). This partnership work has supported you in revising the school's reading curriculum. In turn, you have supported schools in the MAT with developing their approach to the teaching of mathematics.

You found the practical and strategic support of the MAT invaluable throughout the pandemic. You have benefited from the support of the MAT's school improvement partner in honing your leadership skills and driving forward improvements in the curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance, the chief executive officer and trustees of the MAT to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited phonics and reading lessons, accompanied by the phonics and reading leaders, and observed pupils reading with teachers and support staff. I also visited the Nursery and Reception classes with the Nursery manager and Reception leader. I reviewed curriculum plans for reading, early years, science and computing, and the school improvement plan and minutes of governors' meetings.

I took account of 14 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including nine free-text comments, and 37 responses to the staff online survey.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local advisory board and the chief executive officer of the Learning for Life Partnership MAT, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Stillings
Her Majesty's Inspector