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4 July 2022

Mrs Julia Patrick
Executive Headteacher
The Castle Rock School
Meadow Lane
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Leicestershire
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Dear Mrs Patrick

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Castle Rock School

Following my visit with Rachel Tordoff, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 24 and 25 May 2022, 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2021. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first 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 our evaluation.

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

The school continues to be inadequate. Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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 board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Leicestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 May 2022

Context

The school is due to join the Lionheart Education Trust in September 2022. The Lionheart Education Trust has already started to support the school. Staff from the trust have been working with you since November 2021. This support includes appointing an associate headteacher.

The school leadership has been through a period of turbulence since the previous inspection. The associate headteacher has brought much needed stability. Two assistant headteachers will join the school in September 2022. A new chair, and additional governors have been appointed to the local governing body.

Moving forward, your intention is to ensure that all subject leaders are subject specialists. A subject leader in English has been appointed. They will take up their post in September 2022. Curriculum time has been extended in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.

The current management information system is being replaced. You believe this will improve the information available to leaders and to all staff.

Since the previous inspection, 17 members of staff have left the school and 15 have joined.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

You are pleased and grateful that the work with the Lionheart Education Trust has already started. You can see the difference that this support has already made. The associate headteacher has had a positive impact in a short amount of time. Leadership capacity has improved. Appropriate school improvement planning is in place. There is far more clarity about leadership roles and responsibilities. Staff say that they appreciate that leaders are now more visible around the school.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders make sure that pupils receive the help that they need to keep safe. Staff know the vulnerable pupils well. Action has been taken to promote a more tolerant and respectful school culture. A 'proud' group has been established to support LGBT+ pupils, for example. However, leaders do not yet have precise-enough oversight of the nature of harmful sexual behaviour incidents.

Leaders have ensured that the site is now much safer for pupils. You have worked with external agencies to carry out appropriate checks to ensure that health and safety arrangements meet requirements. Pupils know that their school is improving. They appreciate the efforts taken to make this happen.

However, pupils are unanimous in their concern about the quality of toilet provision in the school. They are upset that there is insufficient access to suitable toilets during break and lunchtimes. They are concerned about the unhygienic conditions of the toilet facilities. Some pupils said that they do not feel that the toilets are a safe place. Leaders are trying to rectify this long-standing and problematic issue but much more still needs to be done.

Leaders' actions have improved the behaviour of pupils. The new behaviour policy is working. Teachers now have much higher expectations of pupils' conduct. Most pupils arrive to school and line up in a sensible manner. The majority enter school in an orderly fashion and are ready to learn. Pupils do not truant lessons and wander the corridors. Pupils told inspectors that 'it is ridiculous how much behaviour has improved'.

The strategies to improve behaviour for learning are also beginning to have a positive impact. Lessons are much calmer. Most pupils' learning is not routinely disrupted by the poor behaviour of others. Pupils know the principles of 'SLANT' and 'SHAPE'. They know that their teachers use these principles to help them to develop the skills needed to learn more effectively. It is early days for these developments, but the initial signs are positive.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on pupils' attendance. It is not as good as it could be. Some pupils have found the return to school routines difficult. Leaders are reviewing and refining the ways in which attendance is managed. For example, they are improving the quality and availability of attendance information. Still, too many pupils do not attend regularly enough.

The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is not good enough. Many pupils with SEND do not have their learning needs effectively addressed. Too many pupils with SEND are routinely absent from school. Too many pupils with SEND are excluded from school. Too many pupils with SEND receive their education within an alternative provision. You recognise this. An action plan has been rightly formulated by the Lionheart Education Trust to urgently, and effectively, address this issue. More pupils with SEND need to be in school, having their learning needs supported.

Leaders have started reviewing the curriculum. They are making sure that each subject is well-planned and sequenced and that the core, important knowledge is identified. Leaders have considered pupils' starting points when reviewing the curriculum. They are ensuring the curriculum follows a clear progression from Year 7 to Year 13. Core subjects are further on in this process than other subjects.

Subject specialists from the Lionheart Education Trust are supporting some curriculum leaders. They have worked to identify the strengths of the curriculum and what needs to improve. They are offering good guidance. Teachers have received effective training. Recent sessions include the use of effective questioning. Teachers have started to make use of this training to present new subject content to pupils more effectively than previously. Again, this work is in the early stages.

The reading programme for early readers is not comprehensive or systematic. It does not ensure that pupils at the early stages of reading catch up quickly. More work is needed to ensure that a well-planned and sequenced reading programme is in place.

Staff welcome the changes that have been made. They trust that they will receive support should they need it. They value the additional professional development opportunities open to them. They appreciate leaders' consideration of their workload. Staff said that they feel listened to. They said that they are proud to work at the school. Many said that they are beginning to enjoy teaching again.

Priorities for further improvement

- The provision for pupils with SEND is poor. These pupils do not attend regularly. They do not behave well. They fail to achieve as highly as they should. Leaders must make sure that the learning needs of these pupils are met effectively.
- Too many pupils are anxious because they struggle to readily access clean toilets. Some pupils do not feel comfortable and safe as a result. Leaders must ensure that toilet arrangements better support pupils' welfare and well-being.

Additional support

Leaders have worked effectively with the Lionheart Education Trust. This has helped to significantly improve the quality of school leadership. The work with the trust has accelerated the school's improvement.

Leaders have sought external support from the local authority to ensure that the school site is safe. They have carried out health and safety audits of the school site and completed reviews of safeguarding arrangements. The site is much safer.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan; curriculum plans; information about pupils' attendance, behaviour and exclusions; and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the associate headteacher and other senior leaders, the designated safeguarding leader, the leader responsible for the provision for pupils with SEND and curriculum leaders responsible for English and mathematics. Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils and staff. They observed pupils' behaviour on their arrival to school, during break and lunchtime, and at the end of the school day. They visited lessons.

The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing body and four other governors. She also met with the chief executive officer and assistant chief executive officer of the Lionheart Education Trust.