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Dear Mr Hobbs

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Stephenson Studio School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 14 September 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and with other senior leaders and trustees the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also met with subject leaders and groups of pupils. I visited some lessons and reviewed a range of documentation, including policies, the school improvement plan and safeguarding records. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Stephenson Studio School continues to require improvement. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

Main findings

Leaders are improving the quality of education. They have benefitted from training to deepen their understanding of curriculum improvement. As a result, subject leaders are reviewing and improving subject curriculums. These curriculums are being developed to be ambitious and set high expectations for what pupils should learn. Leaders ensure that curriculum planning identifies key knowledge that they want pupils to learn, including by when. Subject curriculums are well ordered, enabling pupils to build their learning over time. This sequence of learning is supported with planned opportunities to revisit previous learning regularly. For example, in mathematics, the revised curriculum enables pupils to revisit units of learning, deepen mathematical knowledge, build fluency and apply learning meaningfully. In science, the curriculum identifies the key scientific knowledge pupils need to learn. Leaders are beginning to develop the sequence of scientific skills that pupils need to learn and when.

Leaders are prioritising reading. They are developing a culture of reading that supports building pupils' confidence, fluency of reading and comprehension. Staff understand the importance of reading in all areas of the curriculum. The culture of reading is improving. Leaders have plans to further embed reading across the curriculum.

Leaders have established high expectations of teaching. They are developing a consistent approach to teaching, including by ensuring that teachers understand how best to teach pupils. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They deliver the planned curriculum. They ask questions effectively to check what pupils know and learn. Teachers identify and address misconceptions. They extend and deepen pupils' understanding. Resources are appropriate. Teachers use them well. Teachers and support staff adapt tasks to enable pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to know more and remember more over time. Pupils are supported to develop confidence, and many work with resilience. They take pride in their work.

Leaders lead with a strong moral purpose. They work with a clear sense of direction to improve the school's provision. Improvement plans have appropriate actions and ambitious goals. Trustees support and challenge leaders. Trustees check to make sure that the school embeds improvements and is on track to develop further.

The school has improved pupils' behaviour since the previous inspection. There has been a reduction in suspensions and in the use of the internal exclusion room. Many pupils show positive attitudes to learning. They are mostly polite and respectful of each other and staff. There is very little low-level disruption and off-task behaviour in lessons.

Pupils' attendance has been affected by the pandemic. However, the school is successfully working with pupils and parents to reduce absence. Many pupils improve their attendance while at the school. However, too many pupils are regularly absent and therefore do not benefit from the opportunities the school provides.

Leaders have reviewed and improved the school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. The revised PSHE curriculum includes age-appropriate relationships, sex and health education. Pupils learn about potential risks and how to be

safe when, for example, in the community and online. Leaders support the development of pupils' interests and talents through the vocational parts of the curriculum and work experience.

Leaders have maintained a strong culture of safeguarding. They know pupils very well. Staff are well trained and understand their responsibilities. Safeguarding leaders work with external agencies when additional help is needed. Pupils say that they feel safe in school.

Leaders value the support provided by different external agencies. Senior and subject leaders have benefitted from support and training provided by a local learning alliance. Leaders recognise that this support has helped to improve the quality of education, behaviour and leadership.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees of the Stephenson Studio School trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Leicestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Davies
His Majesty's Inspector