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Mr Michael Owen
Acting headteacher
Old Priory Junior Academy
The Ridgeway
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Plymouth
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Dear Mr Owen

Special measures monitoring inspection of Old Priory Junior Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 5 February 2015, 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 which have been taken since the academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2014.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, senior leaders, two representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Brief visits were made to all classes. The academy's statement of action was evaluated, alongside a range of supporting documents and plans. The checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children were reviewed.

Context

Following the inspection, the headteacher left the academy. The governors appointed the deputy headteacher as acting headteacher, in December 2014, to lead the academy. There have also been other staff changes. A deputy headteacher has been seconded from a local primary school. She is now the acting deputy headteacher. A teacher new to the school is leading work related to pupils who are

disabled and those who have special educational needs. One Year 4 class is being taught by a teacher on a temporary contract. A teacher has been appointed to support disadvantaged pupils. Some of the additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority has been used to support this appointment. The academy is in formal discussions about joining a multi-academy trust.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

There has not been sufficient urgency to address all the areas for improvement outlined in the section 5 inspection report of October 2014.

The external review on the use of pupil premium funding that was recommended has not yet happened or been commissioned. While an extra member of staff has been appointed to support disadvantaged pupils, this appointment is relatively recent and has yet to make a discernible difference to the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have worked with a representative of the local authority, in the role of external support to the academy, to write the governing body's statement of action. The governing body's statement of action and the academy improvement plan have been merged into one document. As a result, this document is muddled and does not set a clear direction of improvement for the academy. The current version of this document does not meet the requirements for either a governing body statement of action or an academy improvement plan. As an improvement plan the activities described in the document are often too broad. The plan does not provide the precise steps needed to bring about improvements. There is a lack of clarity about how the actions taken will be checked and how the journey of improvement will be measured and assessed. Too many objectives in the plan do not demonstrate how they will help to improve the quality of teaching, the achievement of pupils and the quality of leadership and management.

The role of governors is not clear enough in either part of the amalgamated governing body's statement of action and the improvement plan. Governors have made a limited contribution in putting the plans together and agreeing the actions to be taken. The inadequacy of these documents means that governors cannot ensure the school is tackling the right actions in a timely manner. Following the very recent external review of governance, it was recommended that the governors should ensure that they are structured effectively with a governor action plan for the year and that governors play an active role in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. Individual governors have begun to play a more active role since January 2015, but as yet the governing body have not agreed a way forward to address fully the areas identified in the review.

The acting headteacher has redefined the roles of the senior and the middle leaders. Consequently, subject leaders have a better understanding of their part in raising standards. However, English and mathematics subject leaders have only just begun to take action to improve the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils.

Since his appointment the acting headteacher has made a concerted effort to improve communication with parents, staff and pupils. Better communication means that the staff are beginning to grow in confidence and they now display greater trust in the leadership of the academy. As a result, teachers report that morale amongst staff is improving.

The academy has just begun to explore a range of support from external partners, including the local authority and a local teaching school. The governing body and senior leaders have not ensured that any external support is effectively coordinated to focus on the right areas for improvement. Consequently, there has been little improvement in the performance of the school since the previous inspection.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The governing body's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gary Chown
Associate inspector