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Friday 17 April 2015

Ms Karen Holmes
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Ms Holmes

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mabyn CofE School

Following my visit to your academy on Friday 17 April, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- ensure governors receive copies of monitoring reports from external consultants to further challenge and support academy leaders
- provide governors with more frequent updates on the quality of teaching within the academy.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of academy, subject leaders for English and mathematics and four members of the Governing Body. I met the principal and academy improvement lead from The Saints' Way Academy Trust to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy action plan was evaluated. Several other documents were examined such as information on pupils' progress, examples of monitoring and evaluating activities

and the performance management of staff. A joint mathematics learning walk to all classrooms was undertaken with the executive headteacher.

Context

New subject leaders for English and mathematics were appointed in February 2015.

Main findings

The executive headteacher and head of academy are continuing to build on the improvements identified at the time of the last inspection in November 2014. Senior leaders have used the inspection findings to push forward the initiatives to develop pupils' writing and mathematics with renewed vigour. A new set of 'non-negotiables' is raising expectations of teachers' planning and marking. Teachers are now systematically evaluating lesson and curriculum planning to improve their own practice by identifying strengths and weaknesses more precisely. The requirement to provide evidence during their performance management reviews of teachers is making them increasingly accountable for their performance. A clear structure of support and challenge has been established for any staff not yet performing consistently well.

A new approach to mathematics lessons is enabling teachers to react more precisely to meet pupils' individual learning needs. Pupils and adults report that the focus on practical problem solving activities is motivating because tasks are more interesting and engaging for them. Teachers are making more use of links between subjects to bring mathematics into every day life and beyond the classroom. For example, the early inquisitiveness of the youngest children was maximised when they were helped to spot Hungry Caterpillar shape patterns and then apply their learning using bamboo and wood in the outdoor environment to make regular 2D shapes.

Teachers raised expectations are leading to an increased range and better quality of pupils' writing. Older pupils extended their vocabulary and punctuation when producing twists on the classic fairy tale Cinderella through creating crime and mystery 'blogs' using tablet technology. The recent solar eclipse developed pupils' understanding well through linking English and science when writing explanations about this phenomena. Throughout the school a purposeful atmosphere pervades. Pupils work well together, in groups, individually, or in pairs, because activities are better meeting their learning needs.

The academy improvement plan aligns carefully with the areas of development in the last full inspection report. Detailed actions contain clear success criteria and specify precisely what teachers and pupils need to get better at. The steps to becoming a good school, articulated in the plan, accurately reflect the sense of pace and urgency required. Regular progress measures to be checked are matched closely to pupil performance data. They include clear targets for improvement while

identifying what is required to develop the classroom environment so that it best supports teaching and learning.

The governing body has a good understanding of the steps required to bring about further improvements at the academy. Pupil progress meetings have been separated from other governing body meetings and are being used more rigorously to ask probing questions and follow up issues. This raised awareness is enabling governors to develop an increasingly accurate picture of how well all groups of pupils are achieving. The variety and frequency of governor monitoring activities is also increasing and they are more aware of the impact of training initiatives, for example, to support the emotional wellbeing of pupils. Through their increased involvement at the academy, governors have a growing confidence in senior leaders' ability to drive forward further improvements. However, they recognise that by having copies of reports from external consultants rather than summaries and, being provided with more frequent updates on the quality of teaching at the academy, they could challenge and support senior leaders even more.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Academy leaders are drawing well on the support offered by the academy trust and more widely from the local authority. Network meetings where information is shared and colleagues work together across the trust are proving effective in supporting new subject leaders. Their work to moderate the quality of pupils' work across a range of subjects is also helping to secure a consistency of approach in their leadership roles. Targeted actions following lesson observations from the academy improvement lead are bringing about developments to the quality of teachers' planning and marking. This effective collaboration and sharing of expertise is helping to accelerate pupils' achievement in English and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cornwall.

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector