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18 June 2015

Mrs E Hermon-Wright
Interim Headteacher
Old Priory Junior Academy
Ridgeway
Plympton
Plymouth
PL7 1QN

Dear Mrs Hermon-Wright

Special measures monitoring inspection of Old Priory Junior Academy

Following my visit with Jennie Cutler, Additional Inspector, to your school on 16 and 17 June 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

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

Plymouth, the lead and team inspector, and the Chief Executive Officer of St Christopher's Multi-Academy Trust.

Yours sincerely

Jane Neech

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that it is at least good, by ensuring that teachers:
 - have the necessary support and training to improve the quality of their teaching
 - plan lessons that build on what pupils already know, in order to set higher expectations for the rate at which pupils, especially the most able, progress
 - check pupils' understanding in lessons so that teachers can reshape tasks and ensure that all groups of pupils are making good progress
 - mark pupils' work regularly, and ensure that pupils know what to do to improve their work and that they respond to teachers' advice
 - set high expectations for pupils' behaviour in lessons.
- Improve pupils' achievement across the school, and especially in writing and mathematics in Years 3 and 4, by ensuring that pupils:
 - have enough opportunities to write at length and to practise their writing skills
 - fully understand mathematical concepts and have wider opportunities to apply them, in order to develop their competence.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including the ability of governors to hold the school to account, by ensuring that:
 - senior leaders have more accurate information on pupils' attainment and progress, and use it to set higher expectations for pupils' achievement and teachers' performance
 - funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to enable these pupils to catch up with their peers
 - the most-able pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive the help they require to make the best possible progress
 - senior and middle leaders have the necessary skills to drive improvement and that governors have the information they need to hold leaders rigorously to account
 - leaders follow plans to improve the quality of teaching and that they evaluate more rigorously the impact of actions taken
 - leaders, together with governors, take effective steps to gain the full confidence of the staff, in order to enable the school to improve quickly.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents, including the governing body's statement of action and the academy's improvement plans. The inspectors met with the interim headteacher, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a governor, and representatives from St Christopher's Multi-Academy Trust. The team had discussions with the following middle leaders; the lead teacher for special educational needs and leaders for English and mathematics. The inspectors talked to parents collecting their children at the end of the school day.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection in February 2015, there have been changes to the academy's leadership. The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have swapped roles. In April 2015, the deputy headteacher took up the post of interim headteacher. The acting headteacher resumed his post of deputy headteacher. The senior leadership team now comprises the interim headteacher and the deputy headteacher. Two class teachers have joined the leadership team in preparation for taking up leadership roles in September 2015. One class teacher has recently returned from a period of absence and is currently on a phased return. From 1 September 2015, the academy is set to become part of St Christopher's Multi Academy Trust.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Lesson observation during the inspection and the work in pupils' English and mathematics books confirm that pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 are not making enough progress. Pupils complete limited amounts of mathematics and written work, often with poorly presented handwriting. In a Year 4 mathematics lesson, pupils were unsure what they were supposed to be learning and so made no progress. This is the result of poor teaching underpinned by teachers' low expectations of what pupils should achieve. More-able pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 are not reaching the standards they are capable of because teaching is not challenging. Consequently, pupils, generally, are not catching up to where they should be in reading, writing and mathematics.

The inconsistency in pupils' achievement across the academy is clear because in some classes pupils do make better progress. Pupils in Year 6 write descriptive pieces which demonstrate their understanding of the use of emotive language to engage the audience. Inspectors saw this in pupils' poetry and diary extracts. In mathematics, pupils in Year 6 can work confidently with decimals. In the notes alongside their work, pupils explain their methods and mathematical thinking clearly. Most pupils, therefore, reach expected standards, Level 4, in English and

mathematics by the end of Year 6. However, not enough pupils reach the higher levels, Level 5 and Level 6, in reading, writing and mathematics.

Some pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs are now beginning to catch up in reading and writing. This is because their extra support is generally better matched to their needs. Pupils in Year 3, receiving extra help, articulate the sounds letters make to build new words. They read aloud confidently and are keen to write sentences without help. However, there are still gaps in the achievement of pupils who require extra help, including pupils supported by the pupil premium funding. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics generally are not rising quickly enough. Many pupils are not achieving as well as they should.

The quality of teaching

Since the inspection in October 2014, the quality of teaching has improved marginally. Some teachers have recently begun to use the assessment information on pupils' progress to plan lessons which capture their interest. In both Year 5 classes, the teachers created exciting learning scenarios which meant that all groups of pupils were very keen to learn about China. Teachers are beginning to plan activities which interest the pupils and encourage them to find out more at home to add to their learning. The pupils' eyes lit up when they talked to the inspector about what they were learning. This improved teaching is beginning to close the gaps in attainment for some. However, this is not the case in all classes.

There is still teaching which does not meet the learning needs of different groups of pupils. Consequently, pupils make little progress and their work remains at a low standard. Not all teachers follow the school's marking policy. This means that the pupils' work is often not finished and not improved. Where teachers follow the school's marking policy, the pupils are able to have another go to improve their work. Pupils in Year 6 told the inspector that the teachers' purple comments are helpful because they, the pupils, know how to correct their mistakes or work a bit harder to finish a piece of work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to be polite, friendly and welcoming to visitors. They are respectful to adults in classrooms and at other times during the day, such as at playtime and lunchtime. Pupils generally enjoy the chance to talk to their partner during lessons. They are keen to contribute to discussions in lessons when the activities spark their interest. In these lessons, pupils get stuck into their work. For example, work in Year 6 English books shows that pupils can produce well-crafted extended pieces of writing. Pupils are less enthused to contribute when the teaching is not matched well enough to their abilities. At these times, pupils tend to sit quietly and are not focused on starting or completing their work.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The first monitoring inspection deemed the academy's improvement plans were not fit for purpose. The new interim headteacher has rewritten the plans with support from the multi-academy trust. Through the involvement of the trust, there is a more rigorous focus on what is working well and what is not. As a result, action plans, for example, for leadership and management, are now clearly focused on the areas of improvement from the section 5 inspection. These plans set a clear direction of improvement for the academy. There are precise steps detailed for improvement and timely review points for each action. Financial resources and personnel are defined for each action. Similarly, it is clear which school leaders, including governors, decide whether actions are successful or not in improving the academy's performance. Governors received training through a review of governance. A review of pupil premium funding took place at the beginning of April 2015. Some governors have a better understanding of their responsibilities in holding the academy to account. However, too much time has been wasted so that all governors are not fully involved in steering the course of improvement and challenging the academy to do better.

The impact of the new interim headteacher on improving teaching and learning is in the very early stages. She has recently established a system for assessing how well pupils are doing. Senior leaders now expect that class teachers use information on pupils' progress to identify more accurately which pupils, or groups of pupils, are falling behind. Senior leaders meet with teachers to evaluate how well pupils are doing. The headteacher has led training for teachers and teaching assistants. As part of the training, teaching assistants welcomed the opportunity to visit other schools to look at support programmes in reading and writing. The focus of this training is just beginning to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve. Inspectors saw the impact of this in some lessons and in some of the extra support sessions for pupils who have fallen behind. As yet, school leaders are not making sure that all teachers and teaching assistants are challenging pupils, including those supported by pupil premium funding, to do as well as they can in lessons. Leaders, including governors, are not holding to account rigorously enough staff who are not performing well.

Since the first monitoring inspection, the new lead teacher for special educational needs has carried out an audit of which pupils require extra support in reading, writing and mathematics. From this, she has updated the special educational needs register to accurately reflect the needs of the pupils. She has provided training for teachers in writing support plans for individual pupils. She has identified that there is a significant group of pupils who are not doing as well as they should. She is at the early stages of reviewing the quality of the support programmes for these pupils.

The leaders for English and mathematics are beginning to make a contribution to school improvement. Their action plans reflect the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection. These are based on accurate information on the current

standards reached by pupils. English and mathematics leaders understand that more is expected of them to improve teaching and learning in their subject. However, middle leaders are not being held to account sharply enough by senior leaders, including governors, for the progress of all groups of pupils in English and mathematics.

Since the first monitoring visit in February 2015, the communication with parents has continued to improve. Parents told inspectors that 'things were better'. They appreciate the opportunity to attend workshops for reading, writing, mathematics and the new curriculum. They welcome news via the weekly newsletter. Parents reported that they attended the parent forum meeting. They were glad of the chance to ask questions related to the academy becoming part of St Christopher's Multi-Academy Trust from September 2015. One aspect of the academy's work noted by parents is the change to the way the support for pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is organised. Parents said they meet with the lead person for special educational needs and are involved in discussions about how to support their children, including liaising with outside agencies.

External support

The academy has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. The support provided by St Christopher's Multi-Academy Trust underpins the recent improvements in leaders' evaluation of the school's work. The statement of action accurately reflects the areas for improvement from the section 5 inspection. The statement details who is accountable for deciding on the effectiveness of actions, timescales and how the academy reports to parents. The trust's Chief Executive Officer and the School Improvement Officer keep a watchful eye on the academy's preparations to transfer from a stand-alone academy to part of St Christopher's Multi-Academy Trust. This includes delivering leadership coaching, and furthering the established links with a Plymouth teaching school alliance and providing support for the interim headteacher from a local leader in education.