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Mr G. Futcher
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Futcher

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to All Saints Church of England Academy

Following my visit to your school on 19 September 2016, 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in February 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve pupils' progress by ensuring that the effective practice in subjects such as science is used to develop a consistently good quality of teaching and learning across all subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, and members of the governing body, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan, teaching and learning policy and literacy policy were evaluated. Pupils' progress information was checked against a sample of pupils' work in their books and in lessons. The lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders.

Context

The previous headteacher retired in December 2015 and one deputy retired in July 2016. A new headteacher was appointed in January 2016. Since then the senior and middle leadership teams have been restructured and some new leadership appointments have been made. There is now a single deputy.

Main findings

The new headteacher's compelling vision of raising pupils' aspirations and teachers' expectations of what the pupils can achieve, in a positive 'can do' culture, is shared by staff and governors. The headteacher is providing clear direction for improvement through the school improvement plan. This, together with the deputy taking responsibility for leading on improving teaching and learning, is resulting in an increased pace of improvement. This was identified as an area for improvement in the previous inspection. The improvement plan focuses on the most relevant priorities. The priorities were informed by the headteacher's accurate self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, which again is an improvement since the last inspection. The evaluation was underpinned by new and rigorous systems for monitoring the progress and attendance of all pupils. This includes pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, the disadvantaged and the most able. Key underperforming groups, such as boys and the most able disadvantaged pupils, have rightly been identified for further support.

The restructuring of the senior and middle leadership teams has led to clearer lines of accountability. Middle leaders are now held to account for pupils' outcomes more robustly by senior leaders. This is enabling them to reflect more accurately on the impact of their departments on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour. In turn, middle leaders hold teachers to account for the progress of their pupils. This is leading to teachers evaluating the impact of their interventions on identified underperforming pupils. These clearer lines of accountability, together with the more accessible progress information, have resulted in a transparent, open culture in which all staff take responsibility for raising pupils' achievement.

Teachers feel supported by the training and professional development that is provided. Increasingly, the training is being tailored to the individual needs of teachers. The needs are identified through effective performance management, which is informed by accurate analysis of pupils' progress information, scrutiny of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

Staff at all levels are supported by effective systems, including those for tracking pupils' progress and managing staff performance. In addition, the policies for teaching and learning, for developing pupils' literacy skills and for feedback on pupils' work, provide greater clarity of what is expected of staff. An improvement since the previous inspection is that all teachers are following the school's feedback and marking policy. However, some written guidance is repeated over time because pupils are not using it to improve their work, even though time is given to making corrections in lessons. In some lessons, it appears that teachers' expectations of the quality and quantity of work produced by boys are not as high as for girls.

The school is rightly focusing on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills. This is highly appropriate, particularly given that the pupils' work shows that a major barrier to progress for the most able disadvantaged pupils is often their limited vocabulary. This stops them from making as much progress as other most-able pupils with the same starting points. Where the conditions in lessons are right for them to do so, pupils are becoming more confident in communicating. For example, in a Year 11 science revision lesson, the teacher asked the pupils in pairs to bullet-point in four steps how heat travels by induction, using his PowerPoint illustration as a guide. The pupils were eager to contribute their ideas and the teacher encouraged them to use more accurate vocabulary, such as particles 'vibrating' rather than 'moving', when explaining the process.

All pupils, including the disadvantaged, the most able and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, made good progress in the science lesson because the teacher constantly checked their understanding and adapted his strategies. For example, he took time out of the planned lesson to address some pupils' misconceptions about the use of air and gases to prevent induction, relating the process to double-glazed windows to help them recall it in future. He identified gaps in their learning, which he then planned to fill. Not all teachers are checking pupils' learning and progress during lessons, and this results in uneven achievement across subjects. Pupils say that they enjoy 'interactive lessons'. This was evident in science. It was also obvious in an art lesson when the teacher set clear expectations by demonstrating how to analyse an artist's work, and by enabling pupils to research techniques that they then applied. She also challenged individual pupils to think about, and explain to her, how they would improve their work. The pupils lost interest in lessons that predominantly consisted of the teacher giving them information, because they could not recall the facts.

Overall, most pupils behave well in lessons, demonstrate positive attitudes to learning in the lessons that engage them, and are calm and orderly as they move around the school. Senior leaders are working effectively with a full-time education welfare officer and parents to decrease the number of pupils who are persistently absent.

The school's information indicates that pupils' progress is above the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations, although it remains below average. This is an improvement on the previous inspection. It is due to improvements in teachers' use of assessment in an increasing number of subjects. Senior and middle leaders have yet to ensure that all teachers are skilled in using assessment effectively to address the uneven progress that remains across subjects and for different groups of pupils.

Governors are now better informed about the school's performance due to the accurate and easily accessible information on pupils' progress, their visits to the school, the headteacher's self-evaluation and the external reviews that they have commissioned. This enables them to challenge more specifically areas of underperformance and to support senior leaders in focusing resources, such as the pupil premium, on the identified priorities. For example, the Year 7 catch-up funding is used appropriately to provide a basic skills programme to ensure that pupils who underachieved in the primary phase are 'secondary ready'. The governors have identified the progress of disadvantaged pupils, boys' writing, subject variation and the sixth form as areas for further development. Their impact is seen in the improved clarity of progress information, and in the improving standards at A level and pupils' progress overall. They have also ensured that the school is giving greater emphasis to careers information advice and guidance to raise pupils' aspirations and ensure that they are 'career ready'.

The safeguarding of pupils is rightly given a high priority in the school and senior leaders address issues such as bullying swiftly and well. Safeguarding is a standing item on the agenda for all governors' meetings. The governors have recently had training, which has helped them to understand more clearly the challenges that face vulnerable young people in the school. Staff and governors have also had training in preventing radicalisation and extremism.

External support

The school is drawing increasingly on a range of suitable external support. Reviews by external consultants have helped the governors to gain an objective view of the school's work. The school has recently joined a local sixth-form consortium of schools, which has increased the range of qualifications available to pupils. It is rightly seeking to forge more links with effective external providers to support staff development.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Exeter, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector