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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Pippa Lloyd
Headteacher
St Thomas Cantilupe CofE Academy
Coningsby Street
Hereford
Herefordshire
HR1 2DY

Dear Mrs Lloyd

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Thomas Cantilupe CofE Academy

Following my visit to your school on 18 July 2017, 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 school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2016. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that those with responsibility for leading subjects implement appropriate strategies to raise further the attainment of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics
- diminish the differences between the performance of groups of pupils and that of pupils nationally, in all subjects
- make sure that pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics by providing work that challenges them, enabling them to work in each subject at greater depth

- make sure that plans for further improvement focus sharply on what needs to be done next to improve the school, and set suitable criteria against which progress towards these objectives can be evaluated.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and a senior leader, the governing body, and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Bishop Anthony Educational Trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's action plans along with other documentation, including monitoring reports, minutes of governors' meetings and progress and attainment information. With you, I observed pupils' learning in short visits to lessons across the school. Together we carried out a scrutiny and evaluation of pupils' work in books.

Context

Since the last inspection you have dealt with some challenging circumstances, as well as managing a number of staff absences and resignations. You have now appointed two assistant headteachers, a special educational needs co-ordinator and three additional teachers. They will take up their posts in September 2017. A new chair of governors will take over from the incumbent at the start of the autumn term. The assistant headteachers will take on responsibility for English and mathematics.

Main findings

Outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 1 and 2 have significantly improved this year. Results indicate that pupils' attainment in reading is slightly above the national average and mathematics is broadly in line with the national average. While writing remains below the national average, attainment has improved significantly. You recognise the need to improve further pupils' progress and attainment in writing and you have identified how you plan to achieve this, including making sure that more pupils achieve greater depth in their writing. In reading and mathematics, few pupils achieve greater depth in their work. In mathematics books, we could see that some activities did not challenge pupils sufficiently in their learning, and help them move on to solving increasingly difficult mathematical problems. You have reviewed the suitability of your mathematics scheme of work and will be introducing a new approach in September.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved and pupils are now making better progress from their starting points across a range of subjects. However, you know that some groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are not making as much progress as other groups and you rightly plan to address this as a matter of urgency. Work in books shows that pupils are now using the regular written

feedback teachers give them to improve their work.

You ensured, through improving the quality of teaching in phonics, that pupils were well prepared for this year's Year 1 phonics check. As a result, more pupils achieved the expected standard. More pupils achieved the expected standard in the phonics check in Year 2 also this year when compared with results in 2016. You have also seen improvements in spelling this year, and strategies such as the 'spelling zapper' are engaging pupils with their spelling challenges and helping them to consolidate their skills at home.

Your focus on writing across the curriculum is beginning to lead to some improvement in pupils' work. You and your staff have made the decision to introduce writing books for all subjects and limit the use of worksheets to raise expectations in this area and ensure that extended writing is developed further.

There is limited evidence of teachers giving pupils opportunities to develop their mathematical skills in other subjects. The development of mathematical skills is more evident in science and design and technology lessons and books than in other subjects. There is currently no expectation for teachers to include numeracy in lesson planning.

Work in books is generally well presented and it is clear that teachers share high expectations of work. Where work is not so tidy, teachers challenge pupils to improve their presentation. Handwriting is usually of a good standard and progress in pupils' handwriting since the previous inspection was evident.

You have taken action to promote high standards of attendance, and to challenge parents who do not make sure that their children attend school regularly. While the current rate of attendance is slightly below the national average, you and senior leaders use a range of strategies and rewards to recognise good attendance and challenge poor attendance, as well as challenging those pupils who arrive late for school. The use of the early breakfast club has improved some pupils' attendance. Classes look forward to seeing who will win 'Billy the Lion' for the best class attendance of the week. You are not prepared to accept poor attendance and parents know this.

You, along with your staff, continue to look at different ways of improving communication with parents. Parents receive regular newsletters and emails about school events, and you use the school's website to celebrate pupils' achievements. You have organised events to which parents have been invited, such as a mathematics activity afternoon, but these have not been well attended. In contrast, the art activity session saw an excellent turnout of parents. You recognise that there is still work to do in this area in order to engage the hardest to reach parents.

Governors are highly committed to the school, well trained and have a good understanding of recent improvements, along with areas which need further attention. The current chair of governors is working closely with the new chair to ensure a smooth transition in the autumn term and maintain the momentum of improvement.

The school's Ofsted action plan and the school development plan currently exist as two documents. As a result of this, some actions are not focused sharply enough within a set timeframe to enable governors to check on the progress being made and the impact of these actions. You and the governors have recognised the need for a more focused plan to enable further improvements to happen in a timely way.

External support

The school receives regular support from a school improvement adviser, appointed by the academy trust. The adviser has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. He has provided additional training to all staff on developing writing across the curriculum. The CEO of the trust is a regular visitor to the school and knows well the challenges that leaders have faced. She has supported the school in making recent staffing appointments, ensuring that those appointed will add value to the school. The trust continues to provide challenge and support to the school in equal measure.

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

Yours sincerely

Deb Jenkins

Her Majesty's Inspector