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5 December 2017

Mr David McGachen
Pinewood School Academy Trust
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Dear Mr McGachen

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pinewood School Academy Trust

Following my visit to your school on 20 November 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 school 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 May 2017. 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 in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- further develop teachers' use of assessment in the classroom so that learning activities are consistently matched to pupils' needs and abilities
- quickly establish the revised middle leaders' roles so that the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment is further developed across the school
- secure precise analysis of the progress of pupils, in particular the most able and disadvantaged pupils, so that all pupils achieve as well as they can.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, your deputy headteacher responsible for teaching, learning and assessment, your assistant headteacher and your school business manager. I met with four teachers, a group of the most able pupils and members of the governing body, and I held informal conversations with pupils in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10. We conducted a learning walk of classes together and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in books. I reviewed a range of documents you provided, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, newly revised curriculum plans, external reviews relating to the use of the pupil premium funding and the effectiveness of governance, teaching and learning monitoring records, and the single central record.

Context

Significant changes have taken place since the previous inspection. There are now 15 classes, reduced from 16. Four members of staff have left and three have joined the school. You have introduced a new assessment system and completed a full overhaul of the school's curriculum. A member of the governing body has also stepped down and you are currently in the process of recruiting a replacement. You are also in the middle of restructuring your leadership team to establish five middle leaders with teaching and learning responsibilities and two key stage leaders.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you and your senior leadership team's work to address the areas for development has been timely and well thought through. You have rightly prioritised establishing a more comprehensive monitoring programme which is linked directly to the revised school development plan. There are regular staff training sessions, the content of which has been identified through a staff audit and your monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment. You have plans to accelerate the completion of all staff appraisals.

The previous inspection report identified the need for governors to hold leaders to account more rigorously for the achievement of pupils. Governors responded quickly and a full external review of governance has been undertaken. Governors are now involved in setting a clear strategic direction for the school. Governors rightly expect more detailed information about the quality of provision at Pinewood School. You have revised the content of your headteacher reports so that governors are more precisely able to review critical aspects of school standards, including the quality of education, safeguarding arrangements, financial management, and leadership and governance.

A full review of your use of the pupil premium has been conducted and precise actions outlined. Most of these actions have been written into your school

development plan, most specifically the capacity to track pupils in receipt of the pupil premium funding to ensure that more timely support can be put in place to diminish the difference between their achievement and that of their peers.

However, some actions have been overlooked. For example, ensuring that the pupil premium funding allocation is made available on the school's website. Governors understand the need to carry out further checks to ensure that leaders complete all actions required of them.

At the time of the previous inspection, teachers did not use assessment effectively. Leaders were not aware of the progress specific groups of pupils were making. Your deputy headteacher has taken decisive action and swiftly established a revised assessment system to monitor specific groups of pupils more precisely. The introduction of this system and leaders' increased monitoring of the progress pupils make are helping to increase the accountability of teachers and improve the accuracy and use of assessment. You acknowledge the need to accelerate this work so that all teachers are competent at quickly identifying pupils' current levels to enable teachers to move learning on more rapidly within lessons.

You are in the process of restructuring the leadership team to improve the school's capacity to bring about the rapid improvements that are necessary in order for the school to be judged good at its next section 5 inspection. You have decided that this process includes establishing five middle leader roles with additional responsibilities for teaching and learning, and two roles for key stage leaders. Staff welcome these changes and talk about how they will benefit from more direct leadership and support that these roles will give to them. As these roles are new, they are currently underdeveloped. Therefore, you know you have to quickly establish these leaders in their roles so they can contribute effectively to improving the standards of teaching and learning across the school.

Teachers' stretch and challenge for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are still not as effective as they could be. Pupils talk about work being 'too easy' and we observed pupils completing work they were already capable of doing. In some instances, teachers' expectations were limiting what pupils could achieve. While we saw some strong examples of pupils making more rapid progress in lessons, this is not consistently reflected across all year groups. Consequently, the most able pupils are not always achieving as well as they could.

External support

You have made determined and successful efforts to secure the help of external partners. For example, your deputy headteacher has worked collaboratively with local schools to identify an assessment system that better suits the needs of the pupils at Pinewood School. You are also working well with the organisation that conducted the governance review to establish a clear action plan that is reflective of the school's needs, strengths and weaknesses. The local authority is also providing

effective support for school leaders. This has led to you and your senior leadership team having a more accurate view of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the skills needed to identify how to address the issues that remain. You are working through the recommendations and have astutely woven the areas for improvement, from all external support, into your school improvement plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Kerry Grubb-Moore
Her Majesty's Inspector