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Denise Williams
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Columba Church of England Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 6 July 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and the multi-academy trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the academy to become good.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the chief executive officer of the trust, the interim headteacher, senior leaders, and members of the local governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement action plans were evaluated. I visited classrooms with the headteacher and met with the subject leaders for English, mathematics and special educational needs. I talked with a group of Year 6 pupils and considered a range of the school's documents, including minutes of governing body meetings and the outcomes of monitoring activities.

Context

Since the last inspection, an interim headteacher has been appointed following the

departure of the previous headteacher. A new local governing body is in place and a strategic group has been established to oversee the school's improvement. Five teachers have left the school and new appointments have been made, including a subject leader for English. A permanent headteacher has been appointed and will be joining the school in September 2018.

Main findings

Decisive actions taken by the chief executive officer and the interim headteacher have significantly improved the school. Since their arrival, these leaders have acted swiftly to tackle any issues that they have identified. The school is now securely on track to be good at the time of the next inspection.

Leaders are clear that the more interesting and engaging lessons that pupils now experience have significantly improved pupils' behaviour. As a result, pupils are happier and make more progress in their learning.

The interim headteacher has successfully supported teachers and middle leaders to improve. Such actions as ensuring that reading activities happen every day and increasing the adult-led learning in the early years have supported the drive to increase rates of learning for all pupils.

Teachers now have more ownership of the progress and well-being of pupils. They feel held to account and well supported by leaders and members of the trust. The training they receive is directly linked to the school's priorities. For example, they have weekly meetings that focus on the quality of everyday teaching. As a result, staff feel more confident in their work. Leaders regularly look at all aspects of teaching. However, leaders do not focus sufficiently on the impact of teaching on the progress that pupils make.

The teaching of writing has got stronger. Pupils rightly say that their writing has improved because their lessons are better. Leaders believe that pupils have moved from being reluctant writers to enthusiastic ones. Teachers regularly look at writing from pupils across the school to evaluate progress and identify weaknesses in teaching. The basic skills of writing are taught more effectively and rigorously. This can be seen in pupils' books, where work is neat and accurate.

Leaders have adopted a two-pronged approach to increasing pupils' progress. Firstly, they ensure that pupils who have gaps in what they know and can do catch up quickly. Then they make sure that everyday teaching enables pupils to maintain good progress. This has led to most pupils making rapid progress in all subjects. Progress is particularly strong in writing in Year 2 and Year 6, where every pupil has made rapid progress.

The extra help available to pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is much better than it was. Leaders have correctly recognised that many

pupils were wrongly identified as having SEN when they just needed to catch up. Training and improvements to the way that learning support assistants are used have strengthened the progress of these pupils. The successful actions to help pupils catch up have resulted in the number of pupils identified as having SEN dropping by one third.

The school has improved the way that it tracks pupils' learning. This has enabled leaders and teachers quickly to identify pupils who have not made the progress they should have. This approach has been further strengthened by the trust-wide approach introduced earlier this year. Governors have a detailed knowledge of current outcomes for pupils. For example, they know the issues faced by disadvantaged pupils and rightly identify the progress of the most-able disadvantaged as the next step for the school.

Pupils are positive that behaviour in classrooms and around the school has improved. They feel safe and are confident that someone will help them if they have worries or concerns. During lessons, low-level disruption is rare. Behaviour has improved because the quality of teaching has improved. Pupils now enjoy lessons that interest and engage them, encouraging them to focus and try hard.

Governance is very effective. The governing body acted swiftly to address the issues identified in the external review of their work. They now have a clear understanding of their role and expertly monitor the progress of the school, including all aspects of safeguarding. They regularly talk to pupils to discover their views. Members of the governing body question and challenge leaders, ensuring that actions taken have a positive impact on pupils. They have a thorough understanding of the current performance of the school and clearly understand what needs to improve. Governors have made good use of the external review of the use of pupil premium funding. Together with leaders, governors closely monitor the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving. In writing, they make the same rates of progress as other pupils in the school. Governors are aware that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils needs to improve.

External support

The school receives highly effective support from the trust. Trustees have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have used this information effectively to ensure that the school gets the correct level of support and challenge. For example, some delegated powers were removed so that leaders could focus on the priorities for improvement.

The plans in place to guide the school's improvement are thorough and detailed. These plans guide leaders' work and set an ambitious pace for change. The trust's clear and decisive leadership, and the very effective planning, have led to the school's recent significant improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Portsmouth, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Phil Minns
Her Majesty's Inspector