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Miss Emma Bloomfield
Headteacher
Potter Street Academy
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Dear Miss Bloomfield

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Potter Street Academy

Following my visit to your school on 17 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 school 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 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 good.

The school should take further action to:

- continue to develop and improve the monitoring of, and ongoing provision for, pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities so that they make the best progress possible from their starting points
- further improve the quality of teaching and learning so it is consistently good across the school, including in early years, to ensure pupils achieve as well as they are capable.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, two members of the governing body, including the vice-chair, and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust. The

focus of the discussions was around the actions and progress made since the previous inspection. You accompanied me on a tour of the school, making short visits to classrooms where we observed pupils undertaking a range of activities. I evaluated a wide range of documents, including the reviewed school development plan, your updated information on pupils' attainment and progress, early years action planning and the minutes of the latest meetings of the governing body.

Context

Since the previous inspection in April 2017, there has been a change in leadership at the school. You started as headteacher in September 2017. You are also the headteacher at Purford Green Primary School. Both schools are part of the Passmores Cooperative Learning Community.

Three teachers have recently left; the deputy headteacher leaves the school in August 2018 and the special educational needs coordinator is leaving in October 2018. New teachers and a new deputy headteacher have been recruited ready for September 2018. Meanwhile, new staff members are already working with pupils as part of the transition process. Recruitment for a new special educational needs coordinator will take place in September 2018.

A home-school liaison officer was recruited in October 2017 to provide additional support for safeguarding and to work with families.

More recently, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils who are joining the school who speak English as an additional language and who are new to English. There is now a dedicated staff member who supports these pupils.

In the current position, pupil numbers indicate that over time the school is likely to reduce to a one-form entry school.

There have been no changes in governance since the previous inspection.

During this monitoring inspection, as part of the school's transition process, Year 6 pupils had already left Potter Street to spend the final two weeks of the academic year in their chosen secondary school.

Main findings

Along with governors and the trust, you have acted swiftly and purposefully, focusing on the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You lead the school with determination and a high sense of moral purpose. Since your appointment, you have worked hard to build effective relationships across the school with staff, pupils and parents. You have successfully built a staff team whom you are confident share an enthusiasm and passion to do their best for the children and pupils at Potter Street. They all understand their role in raising standards. The staff team are

pulling together with a shared sense of dedication and direction. As one teacher commented, 'It's really important to do it right for the children.'

You and your team are successfully improving aspirations of what pupils can achieve at Potter Street. This is leading to pupils trying harder and wanting to do better. Pupils spoken to during the inspection confirmed they were encouraged to 'be the best they can' and they feel 'confident and excited' about what they are capable of.

The school's improvement plans contain appropriate, specific actions with relevant, timely review points and frequent opportunities to check that the school is moving forward. Consequently, leaders, including governors, are in no doubt what is to be done, when and by whom. The governing body is continuously monitoring the work of the school rigorously. It is holding senior leaders to account for their actions and the impact they have on improving provision for pupils so they achieve well.

With much to do, including a change in thinking, culture and ethos, you have concentrated on the main priority areas first. This includes taking decisive action to improve behaviour. A full review of the policy and systems has taken place. This has been shared with adults and pupils. Pupils are responding positively to the raised expectations around the school. This has contributed towards a significant reduction in the number of exclusions undertaken. You acknowledge that on occasions a small minority of pupils still are capable of presenting challenging behaviour, but we saw no disruption in lessons or around the school during my visit. The school was calm, productive and orderly. Pupils had been in their September classes with their new teachers for a week at the time of my visit and all have settled in, positively engaged in their work. Pupils are enthusiastic about the positive changes to behaviour and think you are 'firm but fair'.

You are measuring and monitoring staff performance more precisely and routinely. This work is contributing to meaningful improvements in teaching and learning. Teachers are now held accountable for pupils' progress and are supported to improve their practice. You have been adept in identifying where there is strength in teaching and learning and shared this practice across the school.

You follow the progress of children and pupils carefully, including most-able pupils, to identify any common trends and to review where pupils need additional challenge or require extra help. However, although improving, outcomes remain variable across the school for all identified groups of pupils, including the most able, because teaching is not consistently good. Additionally, leaders are not precise enough in meeting the ongoing needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. You have already identified this area for improvement in the provision for these pupils, and this aspect of the school's work features strongly in your plans for the new academic year.

There has been an improvement in the quality of phonics teaching. This is due to a review of the reading provision across the school and your decision to change the structure of how phonics is taught. You are steadfast in your belief that reading is a

lifetime skill and phonics is the foundation of this to ensure that all pupils are good readers. School assessment information shows that while pupils are making better gains in their phonics knowledge, this has been cohort specific. You are following pupils' progress carefully, ensuring that all pupils receive the help they need to secure better achievement in phonics.

You are currently undertaking an overhaul of the early years provision. You and the new early years leader have a clear understanding of what effective early years practice looks like and are very focused upon improving what Potter Street provides for the youngest children in the school. The new leader and staff have a strong knowledge about the children who are to begin at your school in September and are well prepared to meet their needs.

During my visit, it was evident that you, governors and the trust are resolute in your ambition to bring about rapid, yet sustainable, improvements. Leaders and governors are seeing the impact of their efforts in many ways but are realistically aware of the challenges which remain. Together, you form a strong, effective team who demonstrate the capacity needed to continue the school's journey of improvement towards becoming a good school.

External support

Leaders work effectively within the Harlow Education Consortium (HEP). The allocated school improvement adviser from the HEP has been effective in providing a healthy balance of support and challenge.

A close working partnership is developing between Potter Street and the other school you lead and manage. An effective example of this is the way in which the work in early years is supported by the associate headteacher from Purford Green. She will continue to provide guidance and support to the new leader at Potter Street in early years in September 2018.

The local authority has provided light-touch support in line with the school's previous inspection's requiring improvement judgement.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector