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Principal
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Dear Mrs Tovey

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Barton Hill Academy

Following my visit to your school on 3 October 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in September 2017. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the director of academy improvement of Venturers Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Bristol City. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nathan Kemp

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2017.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that leaders:
 - implement the school’s agreed approaches to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment consistently to rapidly raise standards and improve pupils’ progress
 - provide training for subject leaders so that they take greater responsibility in raising standards across the curriculum
 - check the effectiveness of the work of teaching assistants to ensure that they support pupils effectively to make good progress
 - rigorously check that staff apply the school’s behaviour policy so that learning is not affected.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers have high expectations of what all pupils can achieve, especially the most able
 - teachers assess pupils’ progress accurately and have a clear understanding of what pupils need to learn next
 - teachers adapt learning in lessons and, where work is too easy or too hard, amend activities appropriately
 - phonics teaching is regular, consistently of the highest quality, and phonics learning is accurately assessed so that pupils, especially boys, do not fall behind
 - teachers and support staff consistently address pupils’ misunderstanding when learning basic skills in reading and mathematics.
- Improve early years provision by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan activities to enable children to make strong progress from their starting points, especially boys
 - staff develop the range of resources to reflect children’s cultural backgrounds and so support their learning.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 3 October 2019

Evidence

The inspector met with the principal to discuss progress since the previous monitoring visit. They discussed the school's current improvement priorities. He met with members of the leadership team to discuss their actions to drive improvements.

The inspector carried out visits to lessons, particularly focused on phonics and early reading. He considered how well interventions help pupils keep up with the phonics programme. He visited the Nursery setting to see how well leaders have brought about improvements. He scrutinised pupils' writing, mathematics and foundation subject workbooks.

The inspector met with safeguarding leaders to determine how well they identify pupils that may be at risk of harm and secure the help that these pupils need. The inspector met with members of the school's governing body, the director of academy improvement and a trustee from Venturers Trust.

Context

Since the previous visit in November 2018, there have been few changes to the school or the staffing structure. The senior leadership team is established and has clearly defined responsibilities. There is greater capacity for leaders to secure further improvements. Leaders have turned their attention to providing support for curriculum leaders.

Sadly, since the previous monitoring visit, the chief executive officer (CEO) has passed away. The trust has appointed a new CEO, who is due to start in January 2020. The Director of Academy Improvement has provided support for the school.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Expectations across the school have increased. There is a sense of momentum. This is mainly because leaders and staff are pulling in the same direction. They have provided the foundations for securing further improvements. As standards creep up, behaviour improves and work in books shows increased pride. Leaders know that this trajectory must continue.

Leaders have overhauled the approach to teaching writing. This is a recent development. There are now clear plans in place which let teachers know what they should be teaching and when. This has been a big piece of work. There is a temptation for teachers to go through the objectives as a tick list. When this occurs, it is against leaders' intentions. Leaders expect teachers to develop pupils'

knowledge when working towards a final piece of writing. However, early indications are that teachers are not organising this well enough to secure progress. Lower-attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) struggle particularly. They have too many gaps in their knowledge to be successful with new learning. Teachers are not adapting the curriculum well enough for these pupils.

Mathematics teaching is better than writing. Leaders have been successful in ensuring that pupils develop their number reasoning and problem-solving. This was missing before. Leaders have supported teachers well. Now, teachers provide many mathematical experiences for pupils. As in writing, teachers are not confident about how best to organise lessons so that pupils' learning develops effectively. Lessons often jump from one theme to the next without pupils having enough time to take on board new learning. This makes it hard for them to remember what they have learned already and recall key knowledge.

The teaching of phonics continues to improve. A much-needed financial investment in suitable reading books has taken place. Pupils are now more likely to be able to read books that match the sounds they have been learning. However, the gulf in book quality is vast. There are still occasions when pupils encounter words that they are unable to tackle because books are not properly matched to their abilities. This slows their reading development.

During phonics sessions, pupils engage well. In the best sessions, pupils are clear about the sounds they are practising and have plenty of opportunities to practise this sound. For those pupils that have fallen behind, interventions are effective. Pockets of weakness occur when staffs' subject knowledge is not secure. This results in poor pronunciation of sounds and the use of poor strategies to help pupils say and read unfamiliar words. Despite this, phonics is a rapidly improving aspect of the school. Consequently, the school's phonics screening check results were above national averages in 2019.

School leaders have arranged some of the foundation subjects into themes. Leaders accept that this approach has its flaws. A key question, aimed to whet pupils' interests, links the themes. However, some of the links between subjects are poor. Pupils complete activities for which they are ill-prepared. For example, pupils had to compare two locations about which they had little or no knowledge. These are some of the gaps in the organisation of the curriculum. Senior leaders are supporting curriculum leaders.

The early years provision continues to go from strength to strength. The Nursery class is now a hive of activity. Children enjoy the environment around them and engage confidently with the activities. Children play well with one another. Often, they take on role play. This further supports children's speech and language development. Children are keen to share their experiences with an adult. Adults support children well, particularly those who have English as an additional language

(EAL). Adults have tightened up their assessments of children, so they are better placed to support them and provide meaningful and suitable activities.

Reception classes continue this fine work. Staff set the expectation that children will speak in full sentences. Staff model this well. Many children are finding this ambitious plan difficult to complete.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The principal, senior leaders and staff team has continued to make needed improvements. Since the previous visit, there is an increase in the leaders' expertise. They are tackling areas for improvement well. They have put the structures in place for staff to provide most pupils with a broad curriculum. They recognise that there is more to do. Leaders, when they work together, have a proven track record of securing improvements, for example in the Nursery class.

Leaders have made clear priorities for improvement in the coming year. These include providing training for curriculum leaders. However, plans do not show what it is they want curriculum leaders to achieve once they have had this support.

The trustees and the governing body recognise that systems and processes are not, by any means, a finished product. They have set pupils' achievement targets, but these are too broad and lack precision.

Safeguarding is a clear strength of the school. Leaders manage concerns about pupils' welfare well, including those that are particularly serious. They have a successful determination to keep pupils safe. Leaders work well with external support, including the police and health services, to help strengthen their information gathering. This helps when seeking support from the local authority. Leaders have created a culture where safeguarding is a high priority.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- There is added capacity across the senior leadership team. They have tackled areas for improvement well.
- Children's early speech and language development is better supported. They get off to a stronger start to their school life.
- The teaching of phonics is rapidly improving, pupils are better placed to access the school's wider curriculum.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers' subject knowledge when organising learning across the curriculum is underdeveloped, including in the core subjects.

- Pupils who have fallen behind in their learning, and pupils with SEND, do not routinely access a curriculum which meets their needs.
- The quality of books, that help pupils read fluently and confidently, vary too much. Too often, staff cannot select books that are well matched to pupils' reading capabilities.

External support

Leaders have worked with various 'subject hub' groups in the local area, and this has supported them in securing improvements across core subjects of the curriculum.