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Stephanie Blake
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Blake

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of High Street Primary Academy

Following my visit with Tracey Reynolds, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 5 and 6 May 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

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.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Reach South multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes

Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 5 May 2021 to 6 May 2021

Context

All pupils have now returned to learning on site. You have reviewed the impact of the recent lockdowns on how well the curriculum is being learned by pupils. There have been no changes to staffing since the remote visit in February 2021.

We focused on the areas for improvement from the previous full inspection in November 2019. To do this, we looked carefully at learning in English, early reading, mathematics and geography. We considered how pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access your curriculum and the improvements made to pupils' behaviour in and around the academy. We also scrutinised the impact of leaders' plans and the trust's written statement of action on the quality of education.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

You are wholly focused on rapidly tackling the areas for improvement from the previous full inspection. With the support of the trust, you have secured knowledgeable leaders in key positions. Together, you have brought about stability at the school. You have skilfully brought staff together under a shared vision to improve outcomes for pupils. Staff feel valued. They praise how you have protected their well-being at the same time as insisting on higher expectations for pupils.

Leaders' plans, including those from the trust, are carefully linked to what is needed to improve provision further. You are held stringently to account by members of the interim executive board and executive leaders from the trust. This supports you to regularly review the difference you are making to the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, provision is improving. The academy is well placed to improve in the future.

Your actions to improve the curriculum are beginning to bear fruit. Curriculum planning is organised better. Your reasons for the choices you make are clear and appropriate. You have developed planning that focuses on improving pupils' language successfully. As a result, teachers are now skilled at helping pupils explore unknown words. There is evidence that pupils are beginning to use some subject-specific words beyond English and mathematics. However, pupils' use and understanding of language remains underdeveloped overall.

Your actions have had the most impact on teaching. Teachers' subject knowledge is improving. However, these improvements are more secure in some subjects than others. Despite improvements made to planning, the delivery of learning in subjects beyond English and mathematics still needs to improve. Teachers are less clear about how to secure new subject-specific knowledge in pupils' memory in subjects

such as geography and history. This is because they need greater clarity on the key ideas and concepts that should be learned, and in which order they should be taught. The pandemic has unhelpfully hampered the impact of the intended improvements to the curriculum on pupils' learning. For example, there have been significant gaps in pupils' access to certain subjects, such as geography. This has made it difficult for pupils to remember what they have learned in the past. In turn, this hampers their ability to take their learning forwards now that they have returned to school.

You have utilised useful support from the trust and the local English hub to relaunch how you teach reading. You have appointed a new leader of early reading. You have sensibly retrained staff. Leaders' effective monitoring means there is now much greater consistency in approach. Your use of assessment is sensible. Pupils are grouped accurately according to their need. You are also better placed to identify those at risk of falling behind much sooner. Consequently, children's reading in Reception is much improved. However, a legacy of underachievement means there are still pupils who cannot decode in the way that they should higher up the school. You have rightly identified this as a priority moving forwards.

You have worked hard with staff to develop pupils' love of reading. An appropriate priority is given within pupils' timetables to experience books in different ways. For example, whole-class reading lessons in key stage 2 are increasingly engaging pupils' interest in books. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the stories teachers read to them at the end of each day, such as Kensuke's Kingdom in Years 5 and 6.

You have successfully improved provision in the early years. Indoor and outdoor learning spaces are much more engaging and carefully presented. Children are responding well to the improvements that have been made. They show sustained focus when learning through their play. A love of reading is promoted from the very start. For example, the reading area in the outdoor provision in Reception is enticing, exciting and enjoyed by children. Positive relationships are promoted effectively. Consequently, children are increasingly learning and playing with enthusiasm.

The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is making a positive difference. She is passionate and knowledgeable. She is building useful links with key professionals in the local area. The SENCo has rightly focused on upskilling teachers to be better at meeting pupils' needs. As a result, teachers are making useful adaptations to how they teach during lessons. She rightly acknowledges that there is more work to do to get the consistency in practice she expects. However, more work is also needed to support teachers to think about what they teach, in what order and in smaller, manageable chunks. This will help teachers to plan learning that is accessible for pupils with SEND in all subjects across the curriculum.

You and the SENCo recognise there is still a legacy from the previously poor provision for pupils with SEND. This means there are several SEND pupils whose

needs have not yet been fully identified. For example, you are working through a backlog of applications for education, health and care plans. Consequently, there is more to do to ensure teachers are fully informed about the needs of pupils they teach.

Your work to improve pupils' behaviour in and around the school has been successful. You have developed a strong behaviour policy. You have provided useful training to ensure that staff are skilled at understanding pupils' behaviour. Staff and pupils routinely follow your new higher expectations. There is an increasingly purposeful environment. Positive relationships are modelled effectively. Consequently, many pupils say that behaviour is getting better and they feel safe.

Additional support

You have made strong use of external support, which is often usefully secured through the collaborations that have been established by the trust. For example, skilled staff have been seconded into key positions in the academy. You waste no time acting on forensic feedback you are given from external advisers commissioned by the trust. This has allowed you to make sensible, timely changes to the curriculum and to your approach to teaching reading and mathematics.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer and director of education from the trust. They also spoke with pupils and a representative from the interim executive board.