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Chris Luxford
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Dear Mr Luxford

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Milton Abbot School

Following my visit to your school on 5 May 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- implement ambitious curriculum plans in every subject so that pupils gain the depth of knowledge they need to be well prepared for their next stage of education
- ensure that teachers routinely check the progress that pupils are making in all subjects.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been some changes in staffing. The early years leader and one teacher have recently left. You have reallocated subject coordinator roles and the leadership of the early years.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you and your staff have successfully tackled the areas identified as needing improvement. Staff morale is high, and parents are complimentary of you and your staff.

You have made significant changes to the curriculum. Recently, you and your subject leaders have started to evaluate the impact of these changes. You are using this information to improve the curriculum further. However, due to COVID-19, it is taking more time than planned to complete these reviews.

Tangible improvements can be seen in pupils' early reading. You have introduced a system for the teaching of phonics. This is helping pupils in Reception and key stage 1 to develop their reading skills well. However, some of the weaker readers in key stage 2 have not caught up yet. The early reading leader is working hard to provide additional support to help these pupils catch up quickly.

Subject leaders are determined to improve the quality of education further. A common approach to teaching vocabulary is having a positive impact on pupils' writing across the curriculum. Pupils have secured the appropriate knowledge that enables them to write for different audiences and purposes. In addition, teachers' focus on improving pupils' spelling and grammar is also coming to fruition. Nevertheless, systems to check what pupils know and understand are not rigorous enough. As a result, teachers are not clear about what pupils have learned.

Through your new approach to teaching mathematics, pupils are now provided with a wide range of opportunities to practise using their knowledge and skills. They are able to draw on what they have learned previously in new situations. However, checks to confirm what pupils have learned as they progress through the mathematics curriculum are not thorough enough. You and your subject leader recognise that further work is needed to ensure that checks are made at appropriate points. This will allow teachers to find out whether pupils are ready for the next stage of their education.

Your plans to improve the quality of education further have been hampered somewhat by COVID-19. You recognise that there is still more to do. For example, the order in which pupils learn notation in music has not yet been established. This is because leaders are continuing to develop curriculum plans. In computing, teachers do not have the appropriate hardware to implement parts of the curriculum. Consequently, the computing curriculum is not as well organised or

accessible as other subjects. Leaders and governors are aware of these deficiencies and are in the process of changing their curriculum plans.

The governing body provides support and challenge in equal measure. Although frustrated at not being able to visit the school, they have found different ways to check on improvement plans, for example by having remote conversations with pupils.

Additional support

You and your staff have taken on external support and advice readily from a range of sources. You have been quick to develop strong relationships with local schools and organisations. This support has had a positive impact upon the quality of education. You have welcomed the support and challenge from the local authority. However, at times, you have been frustrated by the change in advisers.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, subject leaders, pupils, governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I looked at pupils' work, reviewed documents related to leaders' curriculum monitoring and heard some pupils read.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Middlemore
Her Majesty's Inspector