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Suzie Ottewell
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Dear Mrs Ottewell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Old Priory Junior Academy

Following my visit to your school on 27 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 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school 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:

- improve the curriculum planning and support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) so that they can achieve equally well in every subject

- improve teachers' use of assessment so that pupils know and remember more across the curriculum.

Context

All pupils are now back on site following the recent local restrictions. At the time of the inspection, no staff or pupils were absent due to COVID-19.

Since the previous section 5 inspection, a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has joined the school. You have secured leaders for each curriculum subject. The governing body of Old Priory Junior Academy merged with the governing body of Plympton St Mary Church of England Infant School. Both schools are run by St Christopher's multi-academy trust.

Main findings

Together with other leaders, you have created a strong team ethos. Staff share your aspirations for an effective, broad and balanced curriculum for all. You are wholly focused on rapidly tackling the areas for improvement from the previous section 5 inspection. With the support of the trust, you have secured knowledgeable leaders in key positions. As a result, all areas of the curriculum are improving well.

The governing body is more skilled and knowledgeable to hold leaders to account. Governors sensibly follow the trust's annual governance cycle so that they focus on the right things, at the right times. They challenge you appropriately through well-informed questions and processes.

Subject leadership is now a strength. Subject leaders are enthusiastic experts in their subjects. They make useful checks about the quality of education. Subject leaders use this to work alongside other staff to improve the curriculum. Consequently, the curriculum is increasingly well sequenced. Pupils talk with confidence about their learning. They recognise that their learning has improved well in different subjects.

Leaders' actions are improving the quality of teaching and learning in a range of subjects. Teachers are making better decisions about what to teach to help pupils learn more, particularly in subjects such as science, geography and history. You have rightly identified that there is still more to do. For example, in some subjects, teachers do not always consider the 'smaller chunks' of knowledge that they want pupils to know. This makes it particularly difficult to adapt learning for pupils with SEND.

You have rightly prioritised reading. Your reading leader's enthusiasm for books is inspiring pupils to read. Teachers effectively check how quickly pupils learn to read.

Pupils are grouped precisely according to their need. You are rightly focusing on those pupils who cannot use letter sounds accurately to read when they arrive. Pupils are given the help they need to catch up. However, some staff who teach phonics still need more training to develop their skills and knowledge further. Nevertheless, pupils speak with eagerness about the books they read in school and at home.

The SENCo is already making a difference. She has focused on improving how teachers can better meet pupils' needs. As a result, teachers are making useful adaptations to how they teach. The SENCo understands that more work is needed to support teachers to think about what they teach to SEND pupils in subjects other than English and mathematics. This will help teachers plan learning that is accessible for pupils with SEND in all subjects across the curriculum.

Additional support

You have made strong use of external support, which is often enhanced through considered guidance from the trust. For example, you have benefited from targeted support from a school improvement consultant and a local teaching school. You waste no time in responding to the feedback you are given. The trust ensures that the support you get is focused on the most pertinent actions to make a difference.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the SENCo, the director of school improvement from the multi-academy trust and members of the local governing board, to discuss the actions taken since the last section 5 inspection.

I met with subject leaders for reading, history and art. We visited lessons together. I talked to pupils about their lessons and looked at their work, and heard some pupils read. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the academy's improvement plan, self-evaluation and information relating to pupils with SEND. I analysed the work of some pupils in Year 4 and Year 6, including some pupils with SEND. I also reviewed reports provided by the trust, commissioned school improvement services and from national leaders for education.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of St Christopher's 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