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6 July 2021

Gregg Morrison
Preston School Academy
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Dear Mr Morrison

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Preston School Academy

Following my visit to your school on 22 June 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 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.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in June 2019, one senior leader, one subject leader and a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) have been appointed. A new chair of the governing body was appointed in December 2020.

Main findings

You are tackling the areas for improvement identified at the previous full inspection. You have also acted on feedback provided at the additional monitoring inspection in January 2021. Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Although the pandemic affected improvement work begun after the last inspection, leaders have maintained a focus on curriculum development throughout. Staff are proud to work at the school and believe the school is improving.

You will be implementing a new curriculum in key stage 3 in September 2021. Curriculum development is well under way. Curriculum leaders have asked insightful questions about the structure of the curriculum and acted on feedback from the additional monitoring inspection. This is helping them to strengthen their subject's curriculum. In history for example, careful thought has been given to how the curriculum should be sequenced so pupils build a secure knowledge base and strong understanding of essential content. Leaders in science and English are planning the curriculum so that content builds on what pupils know and can do. Curriculum leaders are now developing assessment to find out how well the curriculum is enabling pupils to achieve curricular goals.

You have allocated time in the curriculum to prioritise reading. As a result, pupils are reading more frequently. You have developed several reading programmes, including a phonics programme, that support weaker readers. The team that supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) regularly assesses the impact of the phonics programme on pupils' reading. Although some pupils are becoming more confident in their reading, there is more to do so that all these pupils improve their reading. Leaders are considering how they can ensure that pupils are matched to the most relevant reading programme.

The SENCo has provided teachers with information about pupils' needs and strategies to help them to plan their teaching. Where these strategies are used well, they are enabling pupils to learn. Sometimes, however, subject curriculums are not clear about how the needs of pupils with SEND will be met. Pupils are supported well in the Albert Einstein Preston Centre. They are attending mainstream lessons where appropriate and following aspects of the school's curriculum in the centre, such as the personal, social and health education programme.

Governors responded appropriately following the additional monitoring inspection. They have sought out training to strengthen their knowledge of pupil premium and school performance measures. This is helping them to provide challenge to leaders. Governors are keen to develop their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. They know that this will help them to ask more pertinent questions around curriculum design and to check the validity of the responses they receive.

Additional support

Curriculum leaders welcome support from their counterparts in a local multi-academy trust. This has helped to develop their strategic view of the curriculum. Governors have appreciated the support they have received from the National Governance Association and have used this to improve their oversight of the school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal and vice principal, the SENCo and representatives of those responsible for governance, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited lessons, and met with curriculum leaders, the leader of literacy and oracy. I scrutinised school documents. I visited the school's Albert Einstein Preston Centre for pupils with autism spectrum disorder.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracey Reynolds
Her Majesty's Inspector