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Francesca Humberstone
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Dear Mrs Humberstone

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Truro Learning 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 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:

- ensure that those children in the Reception class who are working significantly behind in the phonics programme catch up.

Context

At the time of this inspection, there was some disruption to staffing. Two of your seven classes were being taught by supply teachers.

We focused on the areas for improvement from the previous full inspection in June 2019. We looked carefully at English, mathematics and pupils' attendance. We also focused on the impact of support from the multi-academy trust and external support.

Main findings

You, with the support of trust and school leaders, are taking appropriate steps to tackle the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. You started your role as the new head of school in September 2020, with a very clear brief to improve the quality of education across the school. However, you recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic and the partial school closures have slowed the pace of progress. Nonetheless, you have laid the foundations for sustainable improvements. You have rightly prioritised improving some areas of weakness before others. The curriculum leaders are having a greater influence on standards in their subjects.

You have secured improvements in phonics. Staff follow the school's phonics programme consistently well. You know that there is some variability in the quality of phonics sessions. However, the strengths in the teaching of phonics outweigh the weaknesses. You also recognise that some rooms in the school used for phonics sessions are not suitable in their current state. These rooms restrict pupils' view of phonics resources which they rely on. Your efforts to ensure that pupils read books which match the sounds they know are paying off. Pupils practise reading sounds they know, which helps build their reading fluency. You have put in place effective systems to support pupils who are at risk of falling behind. These extra sessions focus on closing gaps in pupils' knowledge and are led by well-trained staff, which helps pupils to keep up.

Despite the strong work you have carried out in phonics, a significant proportion of children in the Reception class have fallen well behind with their reading. They need intensive support to catch up. You put this down to the disruption to their education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. You are taking the right actions to support these children, but know that this work now needs to increase in urgency. You rightly recognise that unless children learn how to read, their future learning will be restricted.

You are bringing about steady improvements in mathematics. At the previous inspection, teachers were not promoting pupils' reasoning effectively. You have brought about much-needed consistency in how mathematics is taught across the school. You recognised early on that for pupils' reasoning to improve, they first would need to be fluent with number facts and calculation. The mathematics leader

is highly knowledgeable. She is supporting teachers to plan opportunities for pupils to develop their number fluency. As a result of this work, pupils' workbooks show greater consideration of what they already know, and their number knowledge is developing well.

The approach to teaching writing is becoming more consistent. Previously, there was confusion about what teachers should be teaching and when. As a result, you could not be sure that pupils were being taught the breadth of the curriculum. You and your English curriculum leader have curriculum plans in place to ensure that pupils enjoy, and make progress in, different types of writing. These plans make clear to teachers what pupils should already know, helping them build on pupils' prior knowledge. On top of this, you are prioritising pupils' use of spelling, punctuation and grammar. These improvements are taking root well.

You are successfully reducing pupils' absence and persistent absence. You have raised expectations and worked with families closely. You track pupils' attendance carefully so you can target those pupils whose attendance is showing signs of falling. These procedures are robust and widely understood by families and your staff. As a result, pupils' persistent absence has more than halved.

Additional support

Leaders across the trust know the school well. This knowledge helps them to direct support accurately. Through the role of the strategic partner, information about the school's progress is shared more widely within the trust. This keeps trustees, the chief executive officer (CEO), the deputy CEO and directors up to date, so they can provide further challenge or support where it is needed.

The school has benefited from an intense package of support from within the multi-academy trust. Support has come in many forms. These include direct support for you from the trust's strategic partner, and specific support from the trust's specialists in: mathematics; the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities; early years; and attendance. This support has resulted in improvements since the previous inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the academy's strategic partner, the multi-academy trust deputy CEO, curriculum leaders for English, phonics and mathematics and leaders responsible for improving attendance, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the designated leaders for safeguarding.

I carried out visits to mathematics and phonics lessons, including phonics interventions for pupils requiring extra support. I listened to pupils read to a familiar adult, and considered pupils' work in English and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the ASPIRE multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Nathan Kemp
Her Majesty's Inspector