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Dr Timothy Cook
Liskeard Hillfort Primary School
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Dear Dr Cook

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Liskeard Hillfort Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24 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 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.

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed some of the school's improvement work. However, during the partial school closures resulting from the national restrictions, school leaders reviewed curriculum plans. These plans will be implemented in September 2021.

Main findings

You and your team have taken effective action to tackle areas identified as weaknesses at the previous inspection. You have approached these weaknesses with an unrelenting drive to bring about improvements. You have also maintained a sharp focus on making sure pupils are safe. Your actions have been well thought out, avoiding quick fixes and fads. Research and evidence-informed practice has been at the heart of your decision-making. Staff have been supportive of the decisions you have made.

You recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed some aspects of your improvement work, but you have used periods of partial school closures to good effect. For example, you prompted your staff team to read up on research-based strategies to inform their teaching. Staff told me this was a significant turning point in the school's improvement journey.

Phonics is a rapidly improving aspect of the school's work. Your highly knowledgeable phonics leader knows the quality of the school's phonics provision well. Pupils access high-quality phonics sessions, which are matched appropriately to their phonic knowledge. Adults, who lead these sessions, are suitably trained. They keep a close eye on how well pupils are getting on and use their expertise to tackle pupils' misconceptions effectively.

The phonics programme is well resourced so that pupils have all they need to succeed. Where pupils are at risk of falling behind, you ensure there is a range of extra support in place. You recognise that there are some small tweaks needed to further enhance the quality of phonics teaching across the school, but these areas are hugely outweighed by the strengths.

Your effective approach to the teaching of phonics has improved pupils' ability to read confidently and fluently. You have also extended the choices of books pupils can choose from so that they read a greater variety of texts. The newly adopted approach to whole-class reading is having a positive impact on pupils' comprehension and understanding of what they have read.

You have reviewed and changed the approach to the teaching of mathematics. This is understood by all staff and has assessment of pupils' knowledge at its core. Pupils' understanding of mathematical ideas is improving as a result. Pupils enjoy mathematics and receive the support and challenge they need in a timely manner. This keeps pupils' engagement high and prevents pupils from falling behind. The mathematics leader is clear about his expectations and careful monitoring gives him the assurances he needs that there is a consistent approach. This is having a positive impact on pupils' learning.

You and your leaders are currently reviewing and updating curriculum plans for science and the foundation subjects. Curriculum leaders have carefully considered what pupils should already know and what they want pupils to learn in preparation for a revised curriculum starting in September 2021.

Additional support

You have benefitted from highly effective support from centrally-appointed trust leaders. Working together, you have taken steps to bring about improvements. Your actions have been focused, research-based and have taken root effectively.

Your staff have benefitted from working with experts from within the trust and beyond. The trust's director of education has worked closely with you and your staff, offering support, guidance, and challenge where it is needed.

Trustees, representatives from the local governing body and trust staff share information about the school effectively. As a result, these stakeholders know how well the school is making progress and whether additional support or challenge is needed.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leadership team, the chief executive officer and the director of education of the multi-academy trust. I met with trustees and representatives from the local governing body. I met with the curriculum leaders of phonics, mathematics and science. I carried out visits to mathematics and phonics lessons and considered a sample of pupils' mathematics work. I also met with leaders responsible for safeguarding.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Truro and Penwith 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