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20 July 2021

David McGachen
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McGachen

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pinewood School

Following my visit to your school on 25 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 leaders embed the new curriculum plans, so that pupils know more and remember more in all subjects
- ensure that leaders have a systematic approach to help pupils catch up quickly with their reading and that this method is shared.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection in September 2020, there have been no changes to the leadership of the school. Seven teachers have joined the school, reflecting in part an increase in the number of pupils on roll, and two teachers have left. The governing body is led by the same chair. During this time, two governors have left the governing body and two governors have joined.

In the autumn term 2020, more pupils than is usually the case started in Year 7. The number on roll has increased from 172 to 187 pupils.

Main findings

Despite the pandemic, leaders and governors have brought about improvements in all the areas of the school's work that were identified as priorities in the previous inspection report. Some aspects are further along than others. For example, subject curriculum planning is further ahead in its development than the reading curriculum. You are amending your improvement plans further in order to continue to improve the school. You are clear about what you need to do to improve the provision so that pupils receive a good quality of education.

Nearly all parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, stated their child feels happy and safe at the school. Pupils told me how much they enjoy coming to school and that if they have any concerns, they can speak to an adult. Staff feel positive about the support they get from leaders. They are proud to work at the school.

The school leadership team has been strengthened since the previous inspection. Middle leaders are confident and knowledgeable in their roles. You have thought carefully about what you want pupils to learn and the order in which they should learn it. In key stage 3, leaders have adapted a published curriculum plan with the aim of ensuring that pupils know more and remember more about the subjects they study. In key stage 4, pupils now have greater access to functional and practical learning, such as around how to use money, that can be used in their own homes or more widely in employment. Staff are provided with regular training to teach the wider range of subjects. These curriculum developments are new and their full impact is yet to be seen.

Leaders have also focused on reviewing the suitability of courses they offer. These are more relevant and meaningful to less able pupils. Pupils now follow programmes of study that allow them to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in a variety of different contexts.

Since the March 2021 inspection, you have raised the profile of reading. You have put in place programmes to support pupils' full understanding of what they read. These are having a positive impact on pupils' engagement and enjoyment of reading.

Plans are established for September 2021 to expand upon the reading activities available. You plan to timetable daily phonics and daily reading in school and introduce reading prefects. Although the teaching of phonics is in place, some staff do not teach the phonics programme effectively. This is because their training to do so is at an early stage.

Governors have developed a more accurate view of the school's effectiveness. They are knowledgeable about the school and clear about their roles and responsibilities. Governors challenge leaders. They focus on the impact of leaders' actions to improve the school. They talk with staff to establish for themselves how the school is improving. Recently, governors have met with middle leaders to check on the quality of education provided to pupils. Governors are mindful of the workload for leaders and staff and check on their well-being regularly.

Additional support

Leaders and governors acknowledge the benefits of working with the local authority. This partnership has helped them to improve the school. The Hertfordshire improvement partner has provided leadership support and training to the governing body. Staff have benefited from additional training in numeracy development and phonics.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the you, other senior leaders, middle leaders, pupils, staff, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited classrooms to observe learning. I reviewed a wide range of documentation, including that related to safeguarding, the school's improvement plans and training. I looked at 27 responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 16 free-text responses, and 51 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop
Her Majesty's Inspector