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Liz Garman
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Dear Mrs Garman

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Grange School

Following my visit with Kathy Maddocks, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and Mark Lees, Ofsted Inspector (OI), to your school on 6 and 7 July 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in March 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Twynham Learning multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 July 2021

Context

In March 2021, the Twynham Learning multi-academy trust board decided to amalgamate the leadership of The Grange School and Twynham School into one structure. The two schools will remain separate institutions, but from September 2021 they will share a common leadership team.

During the period of COVID-19 restrictions this year, staff prepared remote learning for pupils jointly with Twynham School. Since the reopening of the school to all pupils in March 2021, very few staff have spent time away from work due to COVID-19.

At the time of this inspection, a small number of pupils were self-isolating. They follow the school's remote learning programme when they are at home.

The local advisory board appointed four new governors during this academic year.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

The headteacher is determined to ensure that all pupils in this small secondary school are offered a rich curriculum that covers a broad range of subjects. Teaching in some areas of the curriculum is shared with Twynham School. By making these arrangements, she has ensured that pupils study a wide variety of subjects. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have GCSE and BTEC qualifications to choose from.

During the COVID-19 restrictions in spring 2021, when the school was closed for most pupils, teachers provided a well-organised programme of remote learning. Throughout this period, staff checked diligently on the welfare of pupils. In particular, staff ensured that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities received suitable support. A high proportion of these pupils attended face-to-face lessons in school throughout this period.

Teachers provide an English curriculum that links together different areas of knowledge from language and literature. Pupils analyse different types of literature and identify their key features. However, many pupils' basic writing skills remain weak, particularly in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The headteacher continually seeks to raise pupils' self-esteem. For example, by expecting all staff to focus on pupils' speaking skills, she encourages pupils to express their ideas clearly. Consequently, many pupils' self-confidence is growing. Senior leaders introduced a programme this year to help pupils who enter the school with weak reading skills. This programme has been successful. It has improved the reading fluency of these pupils, many of whom are disadvantaged.

Mathematics teachers continue to develop the curriculum. They have established teaching sequences in each year and carefully considered how pupils' understanding is assessed. Curriculum plans set out the facts and methods pupils will learn and in which order. Nevertheless, plans in Years 10 and 11 do not set out clearly enough how pupils will be taught how to combine these facts and methods to solve different types of problems.

In other subjects, such as geography and art, teachers' curriculum development work has led to improvements in the structure of courses. Teachers consider more carefully when and how particular aspects of knowledge in their subject should be introduced to pupils.

Senior leaders have developed an effective system for assessing pupils' learning across the curriculum and gathering this information. Therefore, leaders have a better understanding of pupils' achievements and so they are better able to fine tune their school improvement strategies.

The special educational needs coordinator provides expert guidance to staff. She ensures that pupils' additional needs are identified accurately so that extra help can be provided to them. This is one of the strengths of the school's work. Over the past year, senior leaders have identified a growing number of pupils who are anxious or who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Senior leaders have reacted by expanding pupils' access to 'the bridge', an area in school where pupils receive extra help. More pupils are now able to benefit from this facility.

When pupils came back to school in September 2020 following the first period of COVID-19 restrictions, a small minority of pupils found it difficult to meet the school's behaviour expectations. Senior leaders introduced behaviour mentors to help these pupils regulate their conduct. This led to improvements in pupils' behaviour.

Senior leaders have ensured that the school's personal, social, health and economic education programme meets the government's new requirements for relationships and sex education. This subject is taught by a specialist team. These staff have used their expertise to make suitable modifications to the programme through this year. Consequently, pupils have been taught about issues such as online safety when they have needed it most.

Staff are proud to work at this school. They understand that this year has involved different ways of working, some of which have added to their workload. Nevertheless, they understand the headteacher's vision of improvement and they feel supported by senior leaders.

One of the strengths of leaders' improvement strategy is their emphasis on improving pupils' experiences outside of their lessons. Pupils, including those who

are disadvantaged, take part in a much wider range of extra-curricular activities now than in the past. The number of sporting, artistic and cultural activities available to them has increased rapidly this year. For example, staff have introduced a boxing club and so pupils are able to try out this sport, many of them for the first time.

Another strength of the school's work is its use of staff, in different roles, to maintain strong communication with parents and carers. For example, throughout this turbulent year, the school's social worker has kept in contact with many vulnerable pupils and their families to provide the help and reassurance they have needed.

At the time of the second monitoring inspection in November 2019, the rate of pupils' attendance was increasing. Pupils' attendance at school this year has been influenced substantially by the COVID-19 pandemic. Now that the school has reopened fully, staff have successfully encouraged most pupils to attend well. Even so, a small number of pupils have found it difficult to return to regular attendance. This remains a barrier to the school's improvement.

Another barrier to school improvement in the last year has been the limitations that COVID-19 restrictions have placed on the ability of staff to spend time with their colleagues at the other secondary school in the trust. As a result, the development of the shared curriculum in some subjects has been held back.

Governors who sit on the local advisory board have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their understanding has been strengthened by the work of the education improvement sub-committee. New governors have brought enthusiasm and local knowledge. Local community involvement in the school is increasing. For example, this year, the school has formed a link with a local rugby club. This is helping leaders to broaden the experiences they offer to pupils.

Additional support

The trust's chief executive officer and the director of standards provide support for the headteacher to implement the trust board's vision for improving the school. The trust board makes collaboration between its schools a priority. The headteacher is in regular contact with her counterpart at Twynham School. Consequently, the trust's plan to merge the leadership structures of the two schools by September 2021 is on track.

Although there is no formal external support for the school, the headteacher and senior leaders draw on advice from schools outside of the trust. They invite senior staff from local schools to review specific areas of their work, such as how they develop pupils' speaking skills. This helps senior leaders to understand better the impact of their work to improve the school.

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers. Inspectors scrutinised documents, including curriculum plans, visited lessons and spoke with groups of pupils. The lead inspector met with the chair of the local advisory board and four other governors, the chief executive officer and the director of standards for the trust.