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Mrs Luci Clapton
Head of School
Stimpson Avenue Academy
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Northamptonshire
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Dear Mrs Clapton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stimpson Avenue Academy

Following my visit to your school on 30 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:

- make sure that all staff are following the school's agreed approach to teaching phonics, including using the pure sounds when teaching
- check that teachers adapt the curriculum effectively to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Context

Since the last inspection, the senior leadership team has changed. The executive headteacher took over leadership of the school in 2019 and, as of September 2020, the two assistant headteachers were promoted to deputy headteacher and head of school. The special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCo) joined in the autumn term 2020. The multi-academy trust has formed the governing body.

Main findings

Leaders have continued to move forward with curriculum development. Detailed curriculum plans set out what pupils should learn and when. Subject leaders from schools across the multi-academy trust have worked together to plan out subject content. They have made sure that the curriculum builds knowledge as pupils move through this school. Teachers are using their knowledge of the new curriculum by recapping previous learning with pupils. They check that pupils have remembered content they have covered before.

Where the implementation of the new curriculum is most effective, teachers make sure that the activity they set for pupils helps them to remember key knowledge. Teachers use discussion and questioning of pupils effectively to help new learning 'stick'. For example, in Year 5, pupils discussed the reasons why different animals might have different gestation periods. In Year 6, pupils considered how the diversity of the local population had changed over time by comparing maps from the 1950s and today. Occasionally, the activity teachers ask pupils to do and what they want pupils to learn are not well matched. Pupils do not learn what the curriculum plans set out. Leaders are working with teachers to be more precise about how the activity they plan will help pupils to remember what they want them to learn.

The school's phonics programme is well sequenced so that pupils learn increasingly more complex sounds to help them to read more difficult words. Pupils' reading books match the sounds that they know. Staff have received training in how to teach the phonics programme. However, a few are not teaching in a way which is consistent with the school's approach. Some staff are not using the pure sound when teaching. Pupils then learn the sound incorrectly.

The school's SENDCo is motivated to make sure that pupils with SEND have the support they require. Since starting at the school, they have made referrals to external agencies and applied for additional funding to make sure that pupils get the support they need. Teachers have received training in how to set targets for pupils with SEND. The targets are achievable and focus on what pupils with SEND need to learn in the short term. Some teachers require more support to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Some pupils are too heavily supported, or they do not have the right resources to help them to be successful.

Pupils are keen to talk about what they are learning. They are polite and readily get involved with whole-class discussion. They are not afraid to put across their point of view. Pupils I spoke with said that they know the different types of bullying, but said that it happens only rarely. They were able to explain what it means to stay safe online, including when playing games or using social media. Pupils talk about tolerance and diversity. They know that we are all different and can explain why it is important to respect these differences.

Despite the limitations of the pandemic, governors continue to provide challenge for leaders. They are keen to know how the pandemic has affected pupils and families. They are beginning to consider what the long-term impact of COVID-19 will be on pupils' learning, as well as dealing with the here and now.

The school's plans for improvement are comprehensive and focus on the actions leaders need to take to make the school better. Leaders review and update plans frequently to show what they have achieved, and what they need to do next. Leaders' determination is driving improvement towards becoming a good school.

Additional support

Leaders and staff are complimentary about the work of the multi-academy trust in supporting them to improve. The collaborative work on curriculum development has helped staff to feel part of the improvement process. It has also given them opportunities to speak with other subject leaders from schools across the trust. They share what is working well and support each other. The school's governors say that their links with the multi-academy trust have enabled them to have a better understanding of what is happening at the school. This has helped them to hold leaders to account better.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with the executive headteacher, head of school, other senior leaders, pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also scrutinised the school's plans for improvement, curriculum plans and documentation associated with the school's procedures to keep pupils safe.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the East Midlands Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Helen Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector