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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Katrina Warren
Executive Headteacher
The Pinetree School
Staniforth Road
Thetford
Norfolk
IP24 3LH

Dear Ms Warren

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Pinetree School

Following my visit to your school on 13 July 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:

- implement a rigorous and systematic approach to the teaching of reading so that pupils gain the knowledge and skills they need to become readers
- sharply evaluate the impact of leaders' actions to sustain improvements for pupils against the most important aspects for school improvement.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection in September 2019, leaders have continued to implement their improvement plans. They have reviewed the curriculum and have made significant improvements in the range of subjects taught. Pupils receive all their education at The Pinetree School. No alternative providers are currently being used. Due to the disruptions of COVID-19, to some extent, the impact of leaders' actions and changes is still to be fully realised.

The executive headteacher remains in post, who also leads other specialist provision within Unity Education Trust (the Trust). The assistant headteacher leads the school. An English teacher has returned to the school after a planned period of absence. Recruitment to positions is under way as the school still requires additional staff for the next academic year.

The school has remained fully open over the months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly all pupils travel to the school via taxi. Although pupils were eligible to attend during the period of national lockdowns, many did not. Most pupils participated in remote learning using a combination of live lessons and published online education materials.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) at this alternative provision free school. The primary need is social, emotional and mental health. Pupils are referred to the school from Norfolk and Suffolk local authorities. Most pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

The school is part of Unity Education Trust. Since the previous inspection, a Strategic Improvement Board (SIB) has been formed to oversee the school's improvement. The board is made up of senior staff and trustees.

Main findings

Leaders have a clear focus on improving the standard of education. They have reviewed what pupils are taught and continue to adapt and refine the curriculum. They have worked with experts from within the Trust and a national leader of education (NLE) to redesign the curriculum to give pupils both subject- and topic-based learning. At Key stage 4, pupils choose their examination courses and are increasingly well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment. The disruption over this year due to the pandemic has meant that the full impact of this work on improving pupils' outcomes is still to be realised.

There is a focus on providing practical opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge and skills. Many pupils continue to study practical courses at college, such as catering. Leaders provide appropriate careers guidance and support so that pupils can begin courses or work in areas of interest. This academic year, where

work experience has not been possible, leaders have still arranged for visiting speakers to hold virtual meetings to enthuse pupils.

In mathematics, the curriculum has been reviewed and improved. There are now more planned opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge and skills through real-life situations. Leaders and teachers are fully aware that there is still more to be done to plan for pupils to experience the same quality of teaching across other subjects. Leaders now need to sharply focus on the impact of their actions on improving pupils' learning and achievement.

Leaders have prioritised improving the quality of teaching of reading. There is now a secure process in place to check pupils' reading ages when they start at The Pinetree School. Leaders have purchased suitable books for pupils to enjoy. There is an increasing focus on sharing vocabulary in lessons, though this is not secure across all subjects.

Recently, leaders have trained some staff to test out their chosen phonics scheme. This trial is proving effective. Most pupils who have been involved in the test programme are making significant gains in learning to read more fluently. Leaders recognise that they still need to implement a rigorous and systematic whole-school approach to the teaching of reading, so that all pupils are taught to read well. More staff require the necessary training to be effective in teaching pupils with SEND to read. Leaders' plans for school improvement for the next academic year have the teaching of reading as a priority.

Adults provide a nurturing environment for pupils to rebuild their confidence with learning and attending school. There is a clear sense of pastoral care and a desire to help pupils achieve well. Staff and leaders motivate pupils to attend school and ensure that reasons for lack of attendance are explored.

Attendance is carefully monitored. However, there are still too many pupils who have less than 50% attendance overall, often due to modified timetables. Members of the SIB are holding leaders more rigorously to account for improving attendance and reducing modified timetables. The impact of leaders' actions to improve attendance continues to be a challenge for leaders to overcome.

The management of behaviour is improving. Staff have received additional training in managing pupils' behaviour. There is a consistent approach in place based on clear rewards and consequences. Fixed-term exclusions are used but there is evidence to show that these are in decline. Leaders monitor significant behaviour incidents and ensure that staff use appropriate strategies to defuse situations. Leaders check the appropriate use of other spaces or rooms where pupils are helped to reflect before returning to class.

There has been a great deal of progress made to strengthen the provision for pupils with EHC plans. The Trust special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) completed

an audit of the provision. Plans are well under way to improve the support that pupils with EHC plans receive. Staff are starting to receive additional training, so that they are better skilled to meet the individual needs of pupils. The systems for reviewing the EHC plans are secure and all plans are reviewed in a timely way.

The SIB provides suitable expertise and experience to hold leaders to account for the improvements to the school. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and remaining weaknesses. Plans for continuous improvement are firmly in place. There is a collective approach to raising the quality of education and standards. Minutes of meetings demonstrate that members of the SIB are asking appropriate questions for leaders to produce evidence of the impact of their work.

Leaders have suitable improvement plans in place. They have identified the right actions needed to improve the quality of education for pupils. Leaders now need to have greater focus on checking the impact and sustainability of their improvement work, especially in reading and attendance.

Additional support

Staff comment on how much they value the professional support they receive from other colleagues across the Trust. There is a more collegiate approach to curriculum and lesson planning in different subjects.

The Trust provides leadership and oversight of many important aspects of the school's work. Staff at The Pinetree School have received training in behaviour management from leaders of other schools in the Trust. The sharing of practice and resources has hastened the pace of change at The Pinetree School.

Leaders appreciate the guidance provided by the NLE to design and review the curriculum provision. Leaders are using the advice provided to ensure that the curriculum suits the needs of pupils.

The Trust and leaders work closely with the local authorities who refer pupils to the school. There are regular meetings in place to discuss the quality of education provided.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the executive headteacher, the assistant headteacher, other senior leaders, staff, the academy trust chief executive officer and other trustees, and a representative from Norfolk local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited lessons, considered work in pupils' books, and observed pupils' behaviour in lessons. I evaluated a wide range of documentation, including minutes of SIB meetings, safeguarding information, the record of staff recruitment, school

improvement plans and curriculum documents. I took account of seven responses to the staff questionnaire.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the Unity Education Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the directors of children's services for Norfolk and Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector