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Michael Astley
Principal
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Dear Mr Astley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Peter's CofE Academy

Following my visit to your school on 12 October 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 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing 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 curriculum plans are sufficiently broad and deep to give pupils a rich learning experience that goes beyond the scope of examination specifications
- make sure that staff support pupils at the early stages of reading to become more fluent readers.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection, there have been few changes to the leadership team. New subject leaders for mathematics and science were appointed in January 2019 and September 2020 respectively. At the time of the inspection, the school was fully staffed.

Prior to the pandemic, you had plans to increase the number of pupils studying a modern foreign language. Your aim was to increase the number of pupils studying the full range of English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects. COVID-19 has delayed your plans.

Main findings

Despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, you and your leadership team have carried on improving the school. You are doing the right things at the right time. Staff want the very best for each pupil. Expectations are high. Leaders' plans accurately identify where the school needs to improve further, for instance in supporting pupils that need additional help with their reading. Staff share your unwavering determination and ambition for the school. Together, you are bringing about sustainable and significant change.

Leaders have maintained a strong focus on pupils' learning. They have prioritised this. Subject leaders have made substantial changes to curriculum plans through the introduction of 'learning journeys'. These carefully set out the order in which pupils will learn new things. These are coherent and learning is sequenced well. Subject leaders are working together to look at how they can link pupils' learning across subjects. In most cases, these plans are ambitious. However, in a few instances, they place too great an emphasis on repeating work from primary school or do not cover the learning in enough depth.

Teachers make regular checks on pupils' learning. This helps them identify pupils' misconceptions and errors. Pupils say that this helps them learn. Teachers then guide pupils to improve and correct their work. This means that teachers know what pupils have learned before, how well they are currently learning and what they will be learning next.

Pupils learn with confidence and take pride in their work. They can explain what they are learning and how it links to what they know and remember. Teachers remind pupils of the key prior learning that they will need to draw on. Pupils find this helpful. In science, for example, pupils use their knowledge of formulae and forces from Year 7 to tackle more complex work on different types of forces in Year 8. As a result, pupils successfully integrate new learning with what they have learned before.

As leaders have developed the curriculum, teachers have had more time to strengthen their own subject knowledge. Teachers value this. They are beginning to discuss how the questions, resources and examples that they use help pupils learn the curriculum. For instance, in mathematics, teachers are using carefully sequenced questions in lessons to

help pupils deepen their understanding. This is helping them become better teachers of their subject.

Pupils in Years 7 and 8 study a broad range of subjects. In Year 9, pupils study a range of options choice subjects. Pupils then refine their choices as they begin their key stage 4 courses in Year 10. Senior leaders are clear that curriculum plans in Year 9 should not simply be the examination specification pulled forward. However, in some subjects, subject leaders focus too much on the GCSE content, seeing Year 9 as a foundation year for GCSE. Consequently, pupils are not learning deeper and broader content in Year 9.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They provide teachers with detailed information about how they can support each pupil with SEND. They then monitor how well teachers use this. They expect pupils with SEND to access the same curriculum as all other pupils, with appropriate support in lessons. This is the case.

You continue to act to improve behaviour. Leaders introduced a new behaviour policy in September 2021. Pupils understand this and say that staff use it fairly and proportionately. They say that they can learn in lessons. Staff and pupils work together well. Pupils trust and respect staff and this is reciprocated. Pupils describe a sense of 'togetherness' that runs through the whole school community. Pupils and staff are proud to be part of their school community. The new system of after school 'corrections' means that pupils do not miss out on learning in lessons if they make poor behavioural choices. Staff also speak to pupils following a sanction to repair and build relationships. Even though this system is new, early indications are that this is further helping to improve pupils' behaviour.

Leaders know that the weakest readers need more help. Staff have been trained so that they can help pupils improve their phonics knowledge. They are yet to begin working with pupils to help them learn to read more fluently. However, plans are in place for this work to start soon. Leaders continue to promote pupils' wider reading. You have made sure that this remains a priority throughout the pandemic. For instance, leaders in geography and history are setting up subject libraries that will let pupils develop their love of the subjects.

Additional support

The multi-academy trust has supported leaders in making improvements to the curriculum. This has been effective. Trust leaders have been quick to bring in relevant expertise to the school to support leaders. Leaders have used this support well and continue to do so.

Trust leaders hold school leaders to account. They provide support and challenge in equal measure. This is helping leaders to improve the school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you. I also met with other senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, the director of school improvement, pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I also visited lessons and held meetings with subject leaders to discuss curriculum plans. I looked at information on the school's website.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Woodard Academies Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Lichfield, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stoke-on-Trent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Tustian
Her Majesty's Inspector