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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Anne Wood
Principal
Hope Community School
167 Rectory Lane
Sidcup
Kent
DA14 5BU

Dear Mrs Wood

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hope Community School

Following my visit to your school on 18 May 2022, 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 received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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:

The school continues to require improvement. 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 thinking is sufficiently detailed for all subjects. Leaders must identify the key knowledge pupils should learn in the wider curriculum. This must be well sequenced to build pupils' understanding cumulatively from the early years onwards

- ensure all pupils have full access to the broad and balanced curriculum offer and the timetabling of interventions minimises any loss of learning.

Context

Since the last inspection, leadership has been stable. The school is a small, one-form entry primary, with only two senior leaders – the principal and the assistant principal. The principal is retiring in September. The trust board is currently recruiting for a new headteacher.

The trust has remained stable, but a new chair of the school council was appointed in September 2018.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, you and the deputy principal have put an improvement plan in place. Trustees have supported you, both with this and through a range of challenges the school has faced. While these are not all to do with COVID-19, the pandemic has further complicated matters. As a result, progress in some areas has been slower than you would have liked.

Phonics and early reading have been key priorities. A new systematic synthetic phonics programme has recently been introduced. The teaching of phonics is consistent across Reception and key stage 1 and begins as soon as pupils start school. Pupils read decodable texts matched to the sounds they know. This helps them learn to read at the earliest opportunity. Additional daily support assists weaker readers to catch up quickly. While this programme is relatively new and needs time to fully embed, it is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.

Commercial schemes have been used as a starting point in some subjects. They have been further adapted to meet the needs of pupils. In computing, these plans have key knowledge identified. Small steps of learning are sequenced, to help pupils develop a deeper understanding. However, this is not the case with history and geography. While there have been some improvements, the history curriculum still does not meet the scope or ambition of the national curriculum. In history and geography, pupils are taught through a topic-based approach. Not enough thought has been given to developing subject-specific knowledge and understanding. Leaders are making learning fit a topic rather than delivering it in a logical order. As a result, pupils are not building the core subject knowledge they need. They remember some key facts, but their understanding is weaker.

You do have clear expectations for how the curriculum should be taught. All staff are expected to help pupils recall what they have previously learned, be clear about the new knowledge they will be learning and know key vocabulary. History and geography teaching does not follow this model well enough, due to weaknesses in the planned curriculum.

You have plans in place to develop the curriculum further. These changes are due to take effect from September 2022. They will also coincide with the arrival of a new headteacher.

You are all committed to ensuring that pupils have access to an offer that increases their cultural capital. The timetabling of interventions to help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), or those falling behind, does not always achieve this. Not all pupils with SEND are able to access the full curriculum programme. You are aware and have plans in place to adjust the timetable so this does not continue.

Additional support

You have been proactive in seeking support. Investment in the reading hub for the new phonics programme has enabled you to train staff and secure continued improvements in reading. Your school improvement partner (SIP) has supported the development of the curriculum. The trust is currently recruiting for a new SIP to assist with the next phase of curriculum development from September 2022.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the principal. I also met with the deputy principal, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, the chair of the trust and those trustees responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

In addition, I visited phonics lessons and listened to pupils read in Reception and Year 1. I scrutinised improvement plans and leaders' self-evaluation and reviewed curriculum planning documents for computing and history. I spoke with a group of teaching assistants, visited a history lesson and looked at a sample of history books from Years 1 to 6.

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

Yours sincerely

Samantha Ingram
Her Majesty's Inspector