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Daniel Simm
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Simm

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Devonshire Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 4 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 has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

This was the second routine inspection the school had 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 of the school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action toward the school becoming a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the pupils who continue to struggle with their learning, following the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in writing and mathematics, catch up as quickly as possible.

Context

COVID-19 did not have a substantial impact on your plans for improvement, other than slight delays in implementing improvements to the mathematics and writing curriculums. However, you have found that many pupils have returned to school with significant gaps in their curriculum knowledge, skills and understanding. This is particularly evident in writing and mathematics.

Since the previous monitoring inspection in April 2021, you have enjoyed a period of stability in staffing among teachers, support staff and the leadership team.

Main findings

You and other leaders have drawn up a suitable plan of action to address the areas for improvement that inspectors identified at the previous inspection. It demonstrates high expectations, is sufficiently detailed, and you regularly evaluate what you have achieved. There is clear evidence that this plan is helping to bring about the required changes to improve the quality of education for pupils.

You have wasted no time in tackling the areas in need of improvement identified at the time of the January 2020 inspection. You have successfully brought the staff team together and morale is high. There is a palpable 'buzz' among staff about how the improvements already made in school are making a positive difference to pupils' increased knowledge and understanding across the curriculum. Although COVID-19 has had a big impact on your school community, you have not let this hold you back from implementing your important school improvement plans.

The curriculum leader and subject leaders have benefited from a range of effective professional development that you and the trust have made available. Subject leaders are now enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their curriculum areas of responsibility. They have thought carefully about what they want pupils to learn. They have ensured that their curriculum subjects are well designed. The curriculums set out in detail the essential knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils will learn and when they will learn it. This is the case for all curriculum subjects.

You have set up a schedule for regular monitoring of the curriculum's effectiveness. You have ensured that subject leaders are given time to check the quality of education in their subjects. They all have the opportunity to look at pupils' books, visit lessons and gather the views of both pupils and staff in their subject. You have made sure that the information they gather is used effectively to identify where it is working well, where it needs adjusting and where there might be further training needs.

Through gathering pupils' views, it is clear that your pupils are really enjoying what they are learning. They are eager to talk about the new things they know. They are confident to use new vocabulary, such as 'mummification', and are beginning to make links between their new learning and what they already know, for example about the different religions and what they believe.

At the time of the previous inspection, a modern foreign language was not part of your curriculum offer. This has now been remedied. You have introduced a well-thought-out curriculum for pupils to learn French across both key stage 2 and key stage 1. This subject has been designed and implemented with the same level of clarity and precision as other subjects across the curriculum.

Reading continues to be a priority for the school. Your approach to early reading and phonics in early years and key stage 1 is increasingly successful. You have a well-established, systematic approach to teaching phonics from Nursery through to Year 2. This is contributing to improving pupils' knowledge and fluency in reading as they move into key stage 2. Your programme to build on key stage 2 pupils' confidence in reading as well as comprehension and vocabulary is having a positive impact on their learning. Pupils talk with eagerness about the books they read and are confident to explain the content.

You have implemented a new mathematics curriculum and a new approach to teaching the subject. This has been effective to date, although it is still being embedded. You have found that this mathematics curriculum is much more attuned to the way your pupils learn. It is much clearer to teachers in terms of precisely what pupils need to learn and in what order. You ensure that there are strategies in place to help pupils remember what they have been taught. You also provide them with more opportunities to explain their learning and to practise their reasoning and problem-solving skills. Teachers are more confident in the subject because of the training they have been offered.

You have also recently implemented a new progressive and sequential approach to the writing curriculum. This has been introduced from the Nursery class to Year 6. When looking in pupils' books, I saw that this was already having a positive impact on pupils' ability to consider the features of different types of writing and to use these to practise, develop and create their own writing.

You told me that although their reading development was not particularly affected by their time out of school due to COVID-19, pupils have a number of gaps in their learning in both mathematics and writing. Teachers are keeping a very close eye on this and have put a number of interventions and strategies in place. However, there is still much more for these pupils to catch up on.

The previous inspection was critical of the way in which the multi-academy trust and governing body had supported the school. This was due to trustees being very busy establishing the newly formed trust. There have been significant improvements in this regard. The trust is now well established. You benefit from the comprehensive and robust systems that have been put in place to support, challenge and hold governors and school leaders account. Governors and trustees are also now confident to hold you and your leaders more effectively to account. Evidence from discussions with the chief executive officer (CEO) and the chair of the governing body, and from minutes of meetings show that they ask you searching questions. These are about a range of issues, including how well the curriculum is developing and pupils are learning. The governance of the school is clear about the school's priorities and has ensured prompt, pertinent actions to bring about the improvements that have taken place to date.

Safeguarding is effective. The school's policy is up to date. The required checks on staff are carried out and recorded properly on the school's central record. You are vigilant about the safeguarding of pupils and are quick to support pupils and families who need help.

Additional support

The multi-academy trust has provided effective and well-tailored support. This has included: auditing school governance; setting up protocols for accountability between school leadership, governors and trustees; securing high-quality support for subject and curriculum leaders in all subjects; and providing a range of high-quality support for teachers and support staff to develop their pedagogical practice. You are also making the most of the opportunities to share practice and expertise with other schools in the trust. You and your leadership team said that you have found the advice and opportunity to have a sounding board for your ideas and developments invaluable. Regular meetings with the CEO are helpful to identify the next steps and to ensure that you receive the right support at the right time.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the curriculum leader, the designated safeguarding lead, a group of subject leaders and the member of staff who is responsible for maintaining the safeguarding checks on staff. I also met with the multi-academy trust's CEO and the chair of governors to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection and the level of support provided. I examined a variety of documentation, including: the school improvement plan; minutes of governing body and trustee meetings; curriculum information; and documents connected with safeguarding. We carried out a series of joint visits to classrooms to look at learning and pupils' work in early reading, phonics, English and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the CEO of the Sea View Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Blackpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector