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7 December 2015

Ms Hermon-Wright
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Ms Hermon-Wright

Special measures monitoring inspection of Old Priory Junior Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 10 and 11 November 2015, with Steven Smith, Her Majesty's Inspector, who shadowed this inspection, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The academy is taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Plymouth, the lead inspector, the Chief Executive Officer of St Christopher's Multi Academy Trust and CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

Jane Neech
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2014.

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that it is at least good, by ensuring that teachers:
 - have the necessary support and training to improve the quality of their teaching
 - plan lessons that build on what pupils already know, in order to set higher expectations for the rate at which pupils, especially the most-able, progress
 - check pupils' understanding in lessons so that teachers can reshape tasks and ensure that all groups of pupils are making good progress
 - mark pupils' work regularly, and ensure that pupils know what to do to improve their work and that they respond to teachers' advice
 - set high expectations for pupils' behaviour in lessons.

- Improve pupils' achievement across the school, and especially in writing and mathematics in Years 3 and 4, by ensuring that pupils:
 - have enough opportunities to write at length and to practise their writing skills
 - fully understand mathematical concepts and have wider opportunities to apply them, in order to develop their competence.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including the ability of governors to hold the school to account, by ensuring that:
 - senior leaders have more accurate information on pupils' attainment and progress, and use it to set higher expectations for pupils' achievement and teachers' performance
 - funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to enable these pupils to catch up with their peers
 - the most-able pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive the help they require to make the best possible progress
 - senior and middle leaders have the necessary skills to drive improvement and that governors have the information they need to hold leaders rigorously to account
 - leaders follow plans to improve the quality of teaching and that they evaluate more rigorously the impact of actions taken
 - leaders, together with governors, take effective steps to gain the full confidence of the staff, in order to enable the school to improve quickly.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 November 2015

Evidence

The lead inspector observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and talked to pupils. The lead inspector met with the interim headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher, members of the governing body and representatives from St Christopher's Multi Academy Trust. These meetings focused on actions taken since the second monitoring visit to improve the academy's performance. The inspector had discussions with leaders for English and mathematics, the leader for special educational needs and a group of teachers. These discussions focused on strengths and weaknesses in teaching and on pupils' progress. We looked specifically at the progress of most-able pupils, those who are disabled or who have special educational needs and pupils who are supported by extra government money, pupil premium funding.

Context

Since the second monitoring inspection in June 2015, there have been changes to the academy's staff. There are new teachers in each year group. A senior teacher took up the post of acting deputy headteacher from September 2015. From 1 September, Old Priory Academy became part of St Christopher's Multi Academy Trust. The trust has removed delegated powers from the governing body. The current governing body is made up of a smaller number of governors than previously. The new Chair of the Governing Body is a representative from St Christopher's Multi Academy Trust.

Outcomes for pupils

Standards in mathematics are rising slowly. Pupils' achievement in mathematics in Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5 is showing some improvement. When pupils have the opportunity to apply what they have learnt in order to respond to mathematical challenges, they do so enthusiastically. In a Year 5 lesson, the most-able pupils tackled complex mathematical word problems and competently explained their calculations. However, this positive picture disguises that in some classes, the most-able pupils are not doing as well as they should, for example in Year 6. This is because the work set for them lacks challenge and is too easy. The most recent National Curriculum test results for 2015 in mathematics show that pupils at the end of Year 6 who are capable of reaching the higher levels (Levels 5 and 6) in mathematics are not doing so.

Pupils, generally, are improving their writing skills. Some pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs have made remarkable progress in writing through the very well-targeted support which matches their needs. This is not the case for all pupils. National Curriculum test results for 2015 show that by the end of Year 6, pupils supported by the pupil premium funding do not catch up quickly enough to where they should be in grammar, punctuation and spelling. This means they are not as well prepared for the next step in education as they should be. Furthermore, pupils in Year 3 display a mixed level of skill in handwriting and presentation. Work is sometimes poorly presented and letters are incorrectly formed because teachers' expectations are not high enough.

Pupils in Year 3 enjoy reading. They talk about their preferences for different authors and texts. Pupils use clues from the text or phonic skills (the sounds represented by letters) to work out meanings of unfamiliar words. National Curriculum tests results for 2015 show that girls are doing well in reading and so gaps in their achievement in reading are narrowing. However, the test results show that the boys have further to catch up to where they need to be.

The interim headteacher has a secure grasp of how well pupils are doing and has developed a method of assessing pupils' progress that enables her to investigate and analyse achievement at a finely tuned level. The academy assessment information shows that pupils currently in Year 6, including disadvantaged pupils, are making better progress towards catching up to where they need to be in reading and writing.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers are now using assessment information to plan work for pupils. In the most effective lessons, activities are matched to pupils' needs and so capture their interests. In a Year 5 English lesson, the teacher challenged pupils to take on the persona of a character from a familiar book in order to discuss feelings and emotions. The teacher supported the pupils' discussions by showing them examples from the text to illustrate words and phrases to use. Consequently, pupils knew precisely how to include new vocabulary in their conversations. This built pupils' skills so they had a secure understanding of how to write a diary entry from the perspective of a character other than themselves.

This monitoring inspection showed that teachers are now working with increased conviction and sense of responsibility. This means that pupils are generally working productively and with a sense of pride. Some teachers respond well to pupils' answers and use the answers to extend pupils' understanding. However, in some lessons, such as in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, the teacher omitted to respond in enough detail to questions from pupils on fractions. This meant that the lesson continued with a level of confusion, which restricted the progress of some pupils.

The work in pupils' books showed that, at times, the most-able pupils often complete work that does not stretch their intellect before attempting more advanced work. In Year 3, particularly, teachers do not give pupils enough opportunities to write at length and practise their skills in extended pieces of work. Generally, teachers' marking follows the academy's marking policy. In one Year 4 class, the teacher marks pupils' work in English and mathematics, without exception, in line with the academy's marking policy. Pupils are given advice and set challenges and so their skills in writing and mathematics are improving. However, not all marking in all year groups routinely adheres to the academy's marking policy. Where this occurs, the pupils have less opportunity to improve their work and progress quickly.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the second monitoring visit, the classrooms and corridors have been repainted and are bright and colourful. The academy now presents itself as an exciting, well-cared for place in which to learn. Displays on the learning walls remind pupils how to behave. There is a range of rewards for good behaviour and for effort. For example, in Year 5 there is an opportunity to be the mathematical 'genius' and wear a special badge. This is one example of the academy's culture of celebrating achievement. Consequently, pupils are proud of their work. They attend school regularly and on time, are smartly dressed and eager to learn. In lessons, pupils are now more willing to contribute and settle down to work quickly and quietly.

Occasionally, a few pupils consider that minor incidents that happen during playtimes, such as falling out with your friend, are not always dealt with effectively by adults.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

School leaders have taken effective steps to gain the confidence of staff. The interim headteacher, ably supported by the acting deputy headteacher, has transformed the attitudes and expectations of staff. This has been brought about by the leaders' astute focus on pupils' progress. The headteacher has worked tirelessly to develop an assessment system that gives information about how well pupils are doing. As a result, teachers generally have a better understanding of how to use assessment information when planning work to match the needs of different pupils, including pupils supported by extra government funding (pupil premium). Leaders set performance management targets for teachers based on the areas for improvement from the section 5 inspection. This means that most teachers have a clear understanding of leaders' expectations for their performance and for pupils' achievement.

As a result of leaders' drive for change, there is now a strong sense of teamwork. Teachers and teaching assistants share ideas and ask each other for help and guidance. Teachers reflect on aspects of their teaching that have not gone well and are confident to 'have another go'. This is a real change in the culture and ethos of the academy from previously. However, concerns expressed at the last monitoring inspection regarding how well all teachers and teaching assistants are challenging pupils to do as well as they can in all lessons have not been dispelled. Senior leaders have begun work to challenge teachers who are not performing as well as they should. Governors are now making a greater contribution to this work. Whilst there has been some improvement in the quality of teaching, as yet this has not improved all teaching and learning.

Leaders have created more opportunities for staff to lead on school improvement. The change to the academy's environment, led by a class teacher, has been a successful piece of work in 'lifting everyone's spirits'. Changes, including wall displays that support pupils' skills in English and mathematics, have raised expectations of the standards pupils can achieve in their work. The leaders for English and mathematics are enthusiastic middle leaders. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects based on school assessment information. English and mathematics action plans fit snugly with the overarching academy improvement plan. Through training, the middle leaders are learning how to coach teachers to improve. However, it is a concern that they have yet to work with staff to put this training into operation to improve teaching.

The leader for special educational needs continues to organise her area of work. Since the second monitoring inspection, she has devised a system for assessing which pupils require extra help in order to close the gaps in their achievement. Consequently, there is a greater expectation that class teachers use assessment information more precisely to decide on the exact nature of the support for pupils. In some cases, this has worked extremely well and some pupils are now making much better progress. Pupil premium funding is also now better directed so that pupils are receiving support that is more appropriate to their needs than previously.

The academy trust has taken over the running of the governing body in order to support and build the capacity of the governors. Members of the trust have brought expertise, increased ambition and professionalism to the governing body. The roles and responsibilities for governors are clearly defined. The governor linked to school assessment uses the information received about pupils' progress to ask probing and precise questions, and insists on equally precise answers from school leaders.

External support

Since the academy became part of St Christopher's Multi Academy Trust, the amount of support provided by the trust has increased. The trust's school improvement officer regularly supports the interim headteacher and the academy's leadership team in improvement work. The trust's Chief Executive Officer continues to play an active role in challenging and guiding the academy's journey of improvement. Links with external consultants provide academy-to-academy support, such as in the analysis of pupil progress information. Middle leaders are receiving leadership training, arranged by the trust, to develop their skills in coaching and mentoring staff. The interim headteacher continues to receive support from a local leader of education, which has helped to build her leadership skills.