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Ms Hermon-Wright
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Hermon-Wright

Special measures monitoring inspection of Old Priory Junior Academy

Following my visit with Adam Morris and Adrian Massey, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 29–30 June 2016, 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the chief executive officer of St Christopher's Multi Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 June 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They met with the headteacher, other leaders and managers, groups of pupils, parents, the chair and members of the interim executive board, the chair and chief executive officer of St Christopher's Multi Academy Trust, and held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the third monitoring visit in December 2015, the headteacher's post has become substantive. A new deputy headteacher and four new teachers have been appointed for September 2016 to replace five teachers who have left or are leaving in the summer term.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher is highly ambitious for the school and determined to bring about improvement more quickly than has hitherto been the case. She is drawing effectively on a wide range of external support to ensure the improvements are sustained. In particular, the chief executive officer, school improvement officer and other schools within the trust have supported her well in developing robust systems and procedures to promote all aspects of the school's work. Procedures include the accurate and rigorous tracking of the progress of individual pupils and groups and the use of this information when managing the performance of staff. As a result, teachers' expectations of what the pupils can achieve are being raised and weak teaching is now being addressed. However, due to several changes in the school's leadership since the section 5 inspection, it has taken too long to tackle the weaknesses in teaching and so pupils' achievement has not improved quickly enough.

The interim executive board, which replaced the previous governing body, has followed the recommendations of the external review of governance in ensuring that it has the appropriate expertise to fulfil its role. The board has gained an in-depth knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This has been achieved by evaluating improvements against the school's action plan, based on the headteacher's reports and first-hand evidence, including observation of the school's work and scrutiny of the information on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. The board is well informed by reports of monitoring visits from Ofsted, the Department for Education and the local authority. The board is using this range of information increasingly effectively to hold senior leaders to account for the school's performance. For example, it challenged senior leaders to improve the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and supported them in the appointment of a new special educational needs coordinator. As a result, progress for this group of pupils is accelerating. The board is now challenging senior leaders to raise achievement for the most able pupils. However, while the interim executive board is knowledgeable about how the pupil premium additional

government funding is spent, it is not challenging senior leaders enough to ensure its impact is leading to better progress for disadvantaged pupils. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium has not yet been carried out to assess how it can be improved.

The chief executive officer and the school improvement officer of the trust are supporting the headteacher effectively in developing the skills of senior and subject leaders in order to distribute responsibility and quicken the pace of improvement. Through the use of a commercial programme and joint training with schools across the trust, the leaders are increasing their subject knowledge and developing skills in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. They check the impact of their support for teachers appropriately through observing lessons, examining pupils' work in books, analysing progress information and holding discussions with pupils and staff. They use this information to identify further support. There are indications that this work is beginning to have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning and on pupils' rates of progress, although it remains variable. In particular, monitoring of teaching does not yet focus enough on its impact on the progress of groups such as the most able, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure they all make good progress throughout the school.

Leaders' commitment to, and enthusiasm for, improving the quality of teaching and learning are gaining the confidence of the staff. Staff feel supported by the systems that have been established, especially the system for tracking pupils' progress. They work cooperatively with each other and with teachers in other academies within the trust to ensure their assessments of pupils' work are accurate and to share good practice. The local authority has moderated the school's assessments and found they were accurate.

All leaders and managers are contributing to improving the quality of the curriculum. They have identified a set of values to underpin pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which are evident in displays and on the school's website. Good-quality displays throughout the school create a positive learning environment and encourage pupils to take pride in their work.

Parents express confidence in the new leadership of the school and the improvements that are being made. They value the frequent communication, especially text messages, and approachability of the headteacher and staff. Parents of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are fulsome in their praise of the additional support they receive.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There are improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, but teaching remains too variable across and within year groups so that pupils do not make consistently good progress. For example, while all teachers follow the school's policy for feedback and marking, some teachers are not checking that pupils use this information and advice to improve their work.

In the most effective teaching, a clear sequence of activities is planned that leads pupils from their prior learning to an appropriately pitched learning goal. A range of resources are used to interest and engage the pupils. For example, in a Year 6 class, pupils were designing robots with great enthusiasm, having visited the local university and met with a robotics lecturer. They then produced some good-quality writing to persuade people to travel to the planet Mars; pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were supported well by learning aids to help them to plan their writing and by the teaching assistant who asked questions that extended their ideas.

Weaker teaching does not provide pupils with the same clarity of purpose. In particular, planned work is insufficiently adapted for those who need additional support or greater challenge. This leads to uneven progress for different groups of pupils. The books of some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities show that the additional support they receive outside the lessons is helping them to make better progress than they were at the start of the year, but that this rate of progress is not sustained in lessons where the work is not tailored to their starting points.

The variable rates of progress made by pupils are linked to teachers' subject knowledge. This is shown, for example, in the effectiveness of teachers' questioning. Although all teachers check pupils' understanding, some do not have the confidence to reshape their questions or activities to reinforce or deepen the learning. Training provided by the trust is helping to develop teachers' subject knowledge.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are eager to learn and they have a thirst for knowledge. In all lessons, pupils' relationships with teachers are positive; they cooperate well with each other in group tasks and follow teachers' instructions. They respond well to lessons that interest and engage them but they say that some lessons are not challenging enough, particularly for the most able, and inspectors agree.

Due to the school's behaviour policy, teachers' expectations of behaviour are higher than previously. However, on occasions in lessons where pupils are not challenged, there is some low-level disruption.

The school is calm, orderly and purposeful. Most pupils behave well and are courteous and respectful to others. Pupils with emotional and social needs are supported effectively through a specific programme and excellent use is made of the school's extensive grounds to provide outdoor experiences for them. The school employs support staff specifically to provide 'student and family' support. They are effective in helping families to support their children's learning. Pupils' attendance is improving and is slightly above the national average.

Most pupils say they feel safe in school. They learn how to keep safe, including when using the internet. They report, and the school's records show, that any incidents of bullying are addressed promptly by the staff.

Outcomes for pupils

Due to weaknesses in teaching, pupils' achievement has not improved quickly enough since the previous inspection. Steps being taken by current leaders are making a difference, with assessment information and work in pupils' books showing improving rates of progress in writing and mathematics. However, it is not consistently strong, especially across classes in Years 3 and 4, due to the uneven quality of teaching and learning. This has resulted in gaps in pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6.

In all year groups, pupils are learning to structure their writing for a variety of purposes and they are beginning to write at length. However, they are not given enough opportunities to apply their skills across subjects to extend their vocabulary and sentence structure. Handwriting and presentation of work remain weak in Year 3, although they are improving in other year groups. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making strong progress throughout the school in organising their writing and using more interesting words and sentences, due to the additional support they receive. Disadvantaged pupils are not making as much progress as they should in developing their use of language. This is also true of the most able pupils.

Pupils are developing better understanding of mathematical concepts than at the time of the previous inspection, but they are given too few opportunities to apply them in solving problems to deepen their understanding and improve their competence. This is especially the case for the most able pupils, who are not making the progress of which they are capable. Disadvantaged pupils are making more rapid progress than in the past. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making stronger progress in calculating using different methods because expectations of them are clearly demonstrated and set out in stages.

Pupils, including the most able, the disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, continue to make expected progress in reading. They draw on a range of strategies, such as phonics (letters and the sounds they make) to understand a range of texts. They talk enthusiastically about favourite books and authors. They would welcome a greater variety of books in the school's library.

External support

The headteacher is drawing on a wide range of external support to secure the school's improvement. In particular, St Christopher's Multi Academy Trust is providing extensive and effective support. The chief executive officer, school improvement officer and other academies within the trust are helping to establish robust systems and procedures. Middle leaders are receiving leadership training, arranged by the trust, to develop their skills in coaching and mentoring staff. The headteacher receives support for new headteachers from the local teaching school alliance. She also networks with other local headteachers and works with the local

authority to secure the accuracy of the school's assessments. Together with the interim executive board, the headteacher makes good use of the monitoring visit reports from Ofsted and the Department for Education to inform the school's self-evaluation.

Priorities for further improvement

- Urgently develop teachers' skills in checking pupils' understanding and in adapting lessons to meet their specific learning needs, especially for the most able, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Ensure pupils, particularly the disadvantaged and most able, make good progress in their writing by developing their vocabulary and sentence structure throughout the school.