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Polly Matthews
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Matthews

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Court Fields School

Following my visit to your school on 29 June 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 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the 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:

- make effective use of assessment to help pupils to know and remember more of the curriculum;
- adapt the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) so that they have the support they need to learn the most important concepts in each subject.

Context

Since the previous section 8 inspection, you have been confirmed in the role of permanent headteacher. In addition, several temporary postholders in your senior leadership team have been made permanent. These include the special education needs coordinator (SENCo) and the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). Three new members have joined the local governing body.

At the time of this inspection, the school was holding an enrichment week. Pupils were not attending their usual lessons. Year 8 pupils were on an educational visit.

Main findings

Since your appointment, you have gained the trust of parents and the wider community. They welcome the improvements to communication that you have made. This has been especially important to them during this period of national restrictions. Parents report that your senior team is approachable and supportive. Staff confirm this. They see that leaders want to work with them to get the best outcomes for pupils.

You consider it vital that pupils become confident readers. Approaches to teaching reading in the school in the past have not been as effective as you would like. You have arranged training for a team of staff to deliver a more rigorous curriculum for phonics. Pupils who need help with their comprehension benefit from reading sessions with a teaching assistant. These pupils now read more than they did before because they can access books which spark their interest.

Governors are increasingly thinking about what they want pupils to know and become. Their knowledge of the curriculum in different subjects is growing. They have begun to meet with curriculum leaders to explore what pupils are learning. The chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust is actively involved in discussions about the aims of the curriculum. As a result, leaders are united around the goal of helping pupils, particularly the most vulnerable, to experience success in school and beyond.

You and your senior team have developed considerable expertise in curriculum design. You have shared this learning with curriculum leaders. They, in turn, have developed the expertise of teachers. Subject teams are working collaboratively to identify the most important knowledge for pupils to learn. They are working productively with their counterparts in other schools within the trust on this task.

You are building a new curriculum. You plan to implement this next term. However, you have not yet resolved how teachers will assess pupils' learning. Currently, teachers use a range of approaches to check what pupils know. Assessment does not always focus on the most useful curriculum content because this is yet to be decided. Leaders' understanding of how assessment helps pupils to embed knowledge is improving, but plans are at an early stage of development.

The SENCo rightly focuses on making sure that pupils with SEND can learn the same ambitious curriculum as everyone else. When pupils struggle with difficult concepts, teachers respond with a range of helpful strategies. Nevertheless, curriculum leaders could do more to anticipate where some pupils with SEND might need further support to grasp an idea and reflect this in their plans. The curriculum is not yet designed to make sure that pupils with SEND gain the knowledge they need.

Additional support

The trust has secured the leadership capacity that the school needs to improve. Trust leaders promote a culture in which staff from different schools work together. Groups of staff hold constructive meetings to discuss the curriculum, pedagogy, SEND, and pastoral matters.

Leaders receive useful support from the trust on safeguarding. The trust commissions an external school improvement partner who provides useful advice to the headteacher.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior team, including the SENCo and the DSL, the CEO of the multi-academy trust, the vice chair of the board of trustees and the chair of the local governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I met with a group of subject leaders to discuss their plans for the curriculum. I held meetings with groups of pupils, with samples of their work, to discuss their experiences of the curriculum and school. I visited pupils during a reading support lesson and listened to them read. I reviewed 194 responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View, including 59 free-text comments, and considered 65 responses to the staff questionnaire.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Castle Schools Partnership multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Lydia Pride
Her Majesty's Inspector