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Luke Rees
Head of School
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Dear Mr Rees

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Bugle School

Following my visit with Susan Aykin, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 26 and 27 May 2021, 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 to improve the school since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in May 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

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

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 May 2021

Context

During the COVID-19 restrictions, the number of pupils withdrawn from the school to be educated at home by their parents increased substantially. The majority of these pupils have returned to the school in recent months.

Several staff have been absent through ill health since September 2020. This includes three class teachers, one of whom is a senior leader. One teacher left the school in March 2021.

A new strategic partner, who advises senior leaders on behalf of the trust, started working with the school in January 2021.

The school has experienced a significant increase in the number of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Throughout the disruption to education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the head of school has been determined to continue improving the quality of education pupils receive.

The school's response to the COVID-19 restrictions was led effectively. Through collaboration with other schools, many pupils were offered face-to-face education at this time. Remote education for pupils was well planned. In mathematics for example, teachers made video recordings to explain mathematical ideas. Pupils found these helpful.

Senior leaders have extended the range of subjects that pupils study and improved the curriculum in subjects that are already taught. Pupils now learn a foreign language and are taught music. In art, teachers are increasingly skilled at helping pupils understand specific techniques such as using pen and ink for line drawings.

In spite of the offer of remote learning, some pupils' early reading skills stalled during the COVID-19 restrictions. Staff are helping these pupils to regain their confidence in reading. Teachers and teaching assistants in early years and key stage 1 are applying the school's phonics teaching programme consistently. Pupils experience the same approach whether they are in whole-class groups or receiving individual help. As a result, pupils' early reading skills are growing.

Pupils' writing has not improved as much as their reading. Pupils' technical accuracy is weak when they compose pieces of writing and their letter formation is not consistent.

Senior leaders have taken effective action to improve pupils' mathematical knowledge. Leaders introduced a calculation policy for staff at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. This policy is now in use across the school. Pupils are more confident in the four operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Pupils in key stage 2 cope with more complicated work because they can do these basic operations quickly.

The school's curriculum structure makes each subject more distinct. Therefore, pupils are better able to recognise individual subjects within it. Teachers believe this is contributing to an increase in pupils' motivation to learn. Subject leaders have drawn up curriculum outlines in their areas. However, some subject leaders lack the subject knowledge required to establish detailed and well-sequenced curriculum plans. Consequently, there is wide disparity in the quality of curriculum planning in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Leadership of the early years has developed quickly since the previous monitoring inspection in January 2020. Leaders have successfully raised expectations of staff and brought about ever closer integration of the nursery and Reception Year provision. The Aspire multi-academy trust early years adviser continues to provide timely and effective evaluation of the provision. This has helped the early years leader and the nursery manager to progressively improve this area of the school's work.

In the nursery, staff read stories to children regularly. Children listen to a range of stories that enable them to retell tales and broaden their vocabulary. As a result, children are better prepared for Reception Year.

Some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive strong support that enables them to learn confidently alongside other pupils. Even so, this support is not consistent across the school. Consequently, some pupils with SEND are not receiving the help they need to learn effectively in the classroom. Staff absence has made this situation worse.

The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language has increased sharply. Many of these pupils come from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. The head of school is passionate about helping these pupils to play a full part in school life. He works closely with other agencies, such as the National Health Service, police, and Cornwall County Council, to ensure that all local children have access to education.

Since the school reopened to all pupils in March 2021, pupils' attendance has been higher than it was in January 2020, before the pandemic. The school introduced a revised attendance policy in November 2019. This policy, along with the work of the trust's education welfare officer, has resulted in increasingly accurate tracking of pupils' attendance.

The trust has increased the amount of time for a parent support adviser for the school. The school responds to families more quickly when concerns are raised about pupils' attendance. Fewer pupils are now persistently absent from school than in May 2019.

A minority of pupils are poorly behaved. This disrupts the learning of other pupils. Leaders have acted to help these pupils to regulate their behaviour. A new forest school facility on site and the use of alternative provision have helped individual pupils. However, the behaviour of a small number of pupils remains poor.

Leaders recently introduced a new policy for teaching pupils about relationships. Parents have been consulted about this. As a result, the statutory requirements of relationships education have begun to be covered within the school's personal, social and health education programme (PSHE).

One of the strengths of the school's approach to securing improvement is the commitment of the trust to develop governance. The St Austell Hub Council oversees the work of the school on behalf of the trust. Hub councillors understand the particular challenges faced by the school. Two new hub councillors have recently been appointed. Each has significant experience in primary education. The hub council has a clear understanding of the school's performance. Therefore, it is well placed to steer the school's efforts to improve.

Another strength is the school's sustained relationship with the trust's early years adviser. She has provided effective support for the school over the last two years that has resulted in improving provision. The school's early years leader is now beginning to share her expertise with other schools through the trust's early years network.

One of the barriers to improvement faced by the school is the slow pace of identifying those pupils who have SEND. When pupils' needs are not identified early, this leads to delays in extra help being provided for them. Consequently, these pupils' learning has been held back.

Another barrier to the school's improvement is the limited capacity of subject leaders to advise teachers about individual subjects across the school. This is partly due to their lack of subject knowledge. However, turbulence in staffing is also a significant factor that limits the effectiveness of subject leaders' work.

Senior leaders acknowledge the negative impact of staff absence on their efforts to improve the school. The majority of staff believe that senior leaders consider their views carefully and try to remove any unnecessary workload. Senior leaders have recently simplified their improvement plans to focus directly on teachers' classroom practice. Senior leaders provide teachers with coaching. Securing consistent teaching for all pupils is a priority.

Additional support

The trust provides support to the school at many levels. The strategic partner attends on site regularly. She works closely with the head of school to provide useful guidance. Hub councillors also provide the head of school, and other leaders, with sound advice. As a result, the school's improvement plans have been shaped by a wealth of experience.

The trust organises network meetings for English, mathematics and PSHE leaders. These networks have helped to develop leaders' curriculum understanding. Teachers' practice in these areas has improved. However, the trust's support for subject leaders in other curriculum areas is less advanced.

Evidence

Inspectors met with the head of school, the strategic partner from the trust, subject leaders, and teachers. Inspectors also visited lessons, spoke with pupils and looked at their work. A meeting about governance was held with two members of the hub council. Inspectors scrutinised documents, including the school's plans for improvement, its own evaluation of its performance and minutes of hub council meetings. Parents' and teachers' responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire were considered.