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Steph Tyler
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Dear Mrs Tyler

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Michael's Church of England Controlled Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 18 May 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.

Context

Since the last on-site inspection, there has been a large turnover of staff. Three new year leaders have been appointed. Some members of the governing body are also new.

Main findings

You, supported by governors, have strengthened leadership in the school. You have made sure that leaders at all levels are more accountable for their work. Leaders are increasingly effective at overseeing their teams. Consequently, staff are clearer about what is expected of them, for example when planning how to teach the curriculum. This is helping to improve the quality of education in the school.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified that the quality of pupils' writing needed to be better. You consequently prioritised improving the English curriculum. There is a more structured approach to how lessons are linked together over time. Teachers' expectations of pupils' writing are now more consistent. They check the accuracy of pupils' writing more systematically. As a result, pupils are becoming confident, accurate writers.

Owing to the disruption caused by the pandemic, you found that younger pupils were not as secure in their knowledge of phonics as they usually would be. Consequently, staff have had extra training so that they are better prepared to help pupils learn to read. You have also made sure that the books pupils use to learn to read match the sounds they are learning closely. As a result, most pupils are catching up quickly. You recognise that not all staff are confident in helping the weakest pupils learn to read, so have wisely planned to support them with further training and monitoring.

Rightly, you have prioritised making sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve well. Leadership of SEND is more systematic and strategic. Staff are better at identifying pupils' needs early on. Pupils now receive more targeted support that is matched to their specific needs. There are signs that this is beginning to make a difference, for example in helping pupils catch up in reading and mathematics. The SENCo is now starting to make sure that the whole curriculum meets the needs of pupils with SEND. She has begun by training teachers and teaching assistants to adapt provision for pupils within the classroom. As a result, the school is well placed to make sure pupils with SEND learn effectively across all subjects in the future.

Your work to make sure that the curriculum in all subjects is implemented well is not as far forward as you had intended it to be. This is because the pandemic prevented you making some changes sooner. At the moment, improvements to English, mathematics and science are more noticeable. However, the curriculum is getting stronger in the other subjects too. Subject plans are more explicit about what knowledge and skills need to be taught. Teachers are starting to check what pupils can remember from previous learning before they teach pupils new knowledge. This is helping pupils to learn more, although there is more to do to improve the depth of pupils' knowledge in some subjects.

Governors know the school and its community well. They have overseen the changes to leadership in the school and are now developing a more organised approach to monitoring the quality of education.

Additional support

The school has benefited from support from the local authority and the diocese. The school has made good use of some well-targeted support to improve the quality of the curriculum, especially in English and mathematics. In addition, the local authority has helped subject leaders to develop in their management roles as they start to monitor the implementation and impact of the curriculum. Wisely, extra support has been brokered this year with the local authority to improve the school's capacity to teach phonics and early reading. You have also sought useful advice from a local infant school and other local schools when planning the curriculum. After the last inspection, an additional senior leader was seconded from another school, which supported the pace of improvement in the school well.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, a group of subject leaders, two groups of pupils, representatives of those responsible for governance, a representative of the local authority and a representative from the diocese, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited lessons in English and mathematics and listened to some pupils read to an adult. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, curriculum plans and the outcomes of local authority and school-based monitoring activities. I also checked the single central register.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Guildford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector