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Jenny Venning
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Dear Mrs Venning

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St John and St Francis Church School

Following my visit to your school on 6 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 three 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 the school 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:

- ensure that the planning of phonics is more detailed so that teachers know precisely what sounds pupils must know and by when
- improve curriculum planning and design in a few remaining subjects so that pupils know and remember more across all curriculum areas.

Context

Leaders have taken the necessary action to minimise the impact of the pandemic for pupils and staff. They are managing the risks associated with COVID-19 to keep those who use the school as safe as possible. Pupils have returned and are now following the full curriculum, as far as current circumstances allow. Pupils are attending well, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The school is currently making plans for the start of a new substantive headteacher from September 2021.

Main findings

Leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator and governors, know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. This is enabling them to take the right steps to keep improving the school, despite the challenges of the pandemic. Senior leaders are successfully building the confidence and knowledge of middle leaders. This means that the school is in a strong position to build further on what is working well and to tackle any remaining weaknesses. For example, subject leaders feel 'empowered'. They like having responsibility to put their plans into effective action.

Governors are ambitious. They are diligent and have established effective partnerships with you and other leaders. There is an appropriate balance of challenge and support which is helping to secure strong improvement.

Since the previous section 5 inspection, leaders have focused well on the main priorities for improvement. A significant part of this has been to improve the quality of early reading and phonics. The school now prioritises this and promotes it well. As a result, teachers, including in the early years, check what pupils know and take swift action to help those who have fallen behind. Pupils with SEND are given targeted support to help them catch up when needed. However, there is still more work needed to make the progression of letters and sounds even more precise and better understood. There are some occasions when learning or pupils' books are not matched closely enough to pupils' phonics knowledge.

Leaders ensure that pupils benefit from learning the full range of subjects. Pupils told me that they like learning about different subjects and often 'want more'. Pupils are keen to learn. Subject leaders have suitably ambitious plans. There are clear learning intentions that start in the Reception Year and continue through to Year 6. Most subjects are developed well so that pupils are learning age-appropriate content. However, there are a few remaining subjects where pupils struggle to recall previous knowledge. In these instances, curriculum progression plans are not yet designed well enough to help pupils know and remember more.

Leaders have managed to keep a range of before- and after-school clubs running. These are continuing to help pupils recover from the effects of the pandemic. Leaders are dedicated to improving the wider personal needs of pupils, including their physical and mental health.

Additional support

The trust has provided a range of support for the school. This has included, for example, the chief executive officer (CEO) being directly involved in working with some middle leaders.

School leaders comment that the external support provided through the English and mathematics 'hubs' has been helpful. Leaders and teachers have engaged fully with a programme of support targeting these key priorities from the previous section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I also met with the multi-academy trust CEO and those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with pupils and teachers from Years 1, 3, 4 and 5 to find out about their learning in geography and modern foreign languages. I looked at some samples of work and visited phonics lessons, including in the Reception Year. I also observed pupils from Years 1 and 3 read to an adult.

I took account of the views of parents through Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including the free-text responses and reviewed the school's staff survey responses. I spoke to some staff about what it is like to work in the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the Bath and Wells Multi-Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector