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Dear Mrs Gordon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Studley St Mary's C of E Academy

Following my visit to your school on 5 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 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 school action plan clearly sets out what is required to sustain the pace of curriculum improvement in all subjects.

Context

There have been several changes in staffing and leadership since the previous inspection. A new governor joined the governing body in March 2021. An interim headteacher led the school in the period January 2020 to November 2020. Leaders from the multi-academy trust (MAT) initially appointed you to start as headteacher in September 2020. However, you did not start until November 2020. This delay was due to matters related to COVID-19.

Leaders prioritised improving the curriculum in reading and writing during the period when the school was led by an interim headteacher. Much-needed work to improve the curriculum in the foundation subjects began when you joined the school. In addition, you have clarified subject leadership responsibilities. As a result, many curriculum leaders are new to their role.

Main findings

You are committed and ambitious to improve the school. Staff and parents recognise the positive impact that you have had since becoming headteacher. You have started to develop staff and build a strong leadership team. Leaders have a clear vision. They rightly focus on improving the quality of education.

Leaders place the highest priority on teaching pupils to read. Leaders have ensured that reading is now at the heart of the school's curriculum. There has been a significant improvement in the teaching of reading since the last inspection. Leaders ensure that all staff know how to teach phonics. Reading books are appropriately matched to the sounds that pupils are learning. This helps pupils to practise and builds their confidence. In addition, leaders have improved how teachers check pupils' starting points in reading. For example, pupils' reading ability is quickly assessed when they start in Year 3. This means that leaders now know which pupils need extra help to catch up. These pupils get effective support from skilled adults. As a result of the improvements made since the last inspection, pupils are making better progress in learning to read.

Leaders have successfully improved the teaching of writing since the previous inspection. Teachers have received additional development opportunities and are now more expert in teaching pupils how to write. For instance, they have a better understanding of how to explain features of high-quality writing to pupils. Curriculum plans are clear about the key knowledge that pupils need to learn to become better writers. Lessons build on what pupils know. Teachers allow enough time for pupils to practise what they have learned. As a result, pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are supported well. They are becoming more independent in their writing.

Many curriculum leaders are new to the role. They have started to improve the quality of plans in some foundation subjects. You and the trust's improvement

adviser have supported these curriculum leaders well. For example, you have provided training in how to sequence the curriculum. This is helping them to develop their knowledge of how to plan an effective curriculum. The curriculum leaders in history, geography and science have made changes to set out the key knowledge that pupils need to know. However, this is not the case in all subjects. For instance, planning has not yet started in art and design, music, design and technology and French. In addition, training to develop teachers' knowledge of how to teach these subjects is at a very early stage. Leaders are aware of this and know that there is much work still to be done.

The school improvement plan focuses on most of the priorities identified at the last inspection. However, it does not make clear how or when leaders will improve some subjects. For example, action plans in art and design, music, design and technology and French are not sufficiently specific about what needs to improve and by when. This means that leaders, including governors, cannot check the speed or success of improvements to these subjects.

Governors are clear about their role to challenge and support school leaders. During the pandemic, they focused mostly on providing support to school leaders. This support included promoting the well-being of staff and ensuring that pupils continued to access education. However, little focus was placed on improving the quality of education in foundation subjects. Governors understand this is now a crucial part of their work in ensuring that leaders improve the school.

Additional support

The MAT has provided effective support for leaders to develop the quality of education. This support has included professional development opportunities for some curriculum leaders to work alongside specialist advisers. These curriculum leaders welcome and apply the guidance given. This is helping to improve the quality of education provided in these subjects. Leaders of subjects where the curriculum is less well developed would benefit from similar support provided by specialist advisers.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, curriculum leaders, the chief executive officer of the MAT and those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I examined the school's single central register of background checks on adults working in the school. I reviewed the school's improvement plan and minutes of governors' meetings. I scrutinised curriculum plans alongside pupils' workbooks and listened to a number of pupils reading to an adult.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Leonard
Her Majesty's Inspector