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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Naomi Wood
Headteacher
Middleton St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Moor Flatts Road
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS10 3SW

Dear Mrs Wood

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Middleton St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 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 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:

- develop the detail and sequencing of the curriculum in foundation subjects so that it is clear what pupils need to learn and how they will build on this knowledge over time
- ensure that middle leaders have the opportunity to develop their curriculum plans and support staff in their implementation across the school.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection, there has been a considerable change in staff and leadership. There is a new team of senior leaders, middle leaders and governors. The school leadership team has introduced new pastoral roles to support the increase in concerns about pupils' mental health and other welfare because of the pandemic.

Main findings

Pupils' behaviour has improved since the last inspection. A very consistent approach to behaviour management means that staff and pupils all know what is expected of them. The high expectations mean that there is a calm and happy atmosphere. Pupils told me how behaviour has improved. Pupils are happy and courteous. Manners are automatic for everyone. Adults treat children very respectfully and this is reciprocated. New pupils told me how they quickly settled in: they were made to feel welcome.

Pupils learn to read through a consistent, whole-school approach to teaching phonics. All staff are involved and trained in how to teach pupils to read. Staff teach phonics well. Books are well matched to pupils' phonic knowledge which gives pupils the confidence and eagerness to read more. A love of books and reading permeates the school. Older pupils enjoy the responsibilities of being librarians. Since all pupils have returned to full time education, a lot of time is spent teaching pupils to read and encouraging a love of reading. Senior leaders recognise that some pupils need time to regain their confidence in reading and others need specific support to cover gaps that have emerged.

Since the last full section 5 inspection, there have been major changes in staffing, leadership and governance roles. A new governing body is now in place, with new members being recruited who have the skills and knowledge to support the school on its improvement journey. Governors' responsibilities are clear. They are able to challenge and support school leaders more effectively than at the last inspection.

A new senior leadership team is now in place. Each member of the senior leadership team knows exactly what they are responsible for and they are confident in their roles. They have clear plans for improvement. The members of the senior leadership team have continued to make most of their planned improvements to the school during the pandemic. However, middle leaders have not had time to fulfil many of their subject responsibilities. This has meant that not all subjects have the expected learning clearly sequenced so that what pupils learn is relevant to what they will learn in the future.

Staff know their pupils well. This knowledge has helped them to support pupils and families when organising remote education. Remote education, when needed, is tailored to the very individual needs of pupils and families. Teachers keep in regular contact with any pupils who are having to learn remotely.

Staff in the school feel well supported by senior leaders. All those who responded to the survey said so. Staff also commented on how senior leaders took care of their well-being, for example, by giving them ample time to carry out additional roles and responsibilities.

Parents are very happy about the improvements school leaders have made since the previous inspection, and 87% of them said that they would recommend this school to another parent. Parents commented that staff go 'above and beyond'. Others said, 'both my children love the school' and, 'my children come home from school each day and are so excited to tell me about what they have been doing'. Parents also said that the 'difference in the school is phenomenal'.

Additional support

The school receives support from the local authority and the diocese. School leaders have used the support well. Support has focused on improving leadership and governance. The local authority and diocese have worked with school leaders to develop the skills and knowledge of the leadership team to improve pupil outcomes. Improvements in behaviour are clear, as is the impact of the phonics programme on pupils' ability to read.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher and all the senior leadership team. I held virtual meetings with two members of the local authority and with the diocese. I also spoke to middle leaders and members of the governing body. We discussed the actions taken since the last inspection.

I heard pupils learning to read with familiar adults and visited several lessons. I spoke to pupils during their breaktimes. I studied curriculum documents and scrutinised the school's register of recruitment checks on all adults.

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

Yours sincerely

Jo Sharpe
Her Majesty's Inspector