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Rob Meech
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Dear Mr Meech

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St John's Catholic 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 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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that subject content is more coherently organised, so that pupils gain the knowledge and skills they need to be well prepared for the next stage of their education
- check more precisely what pupils have learned and remembered.

Context

Since the last inspection there has been staff turnover, including the leadership. In January 2021, you joined the school as executive headteacher. The mathematics leader was appointed as assistant headteacher and the English leader was appointed as the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCo).

Main findings

You took over the leadership of the school during the pandemic. As a result, you have been hampered somewhat in delivering your vision and plans for improvement. Nevertheless, you are now starting to make headway and the changes you are making are starting to have a positive impact.

Since you joined the school, your focus has been on the areas for improvement identified at the previous section 5 inspection in June 2019. Staff welcome the changes that are starting to take shape. Their morale is high.

Over a sustained period, leaders have focused on improving the quality of early reading and phonics. They introduced a new phonics programme, which is helping early readers to make a strong start. The early reading leader's ongoing training and support for staff has ensured that teachers and teaching assistants are well trained. Consequently, pupils are able to read more accurately and fluently. In addition, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive effective support to help them catch up. This is also the case for pupils who have fallen behind because of COVID-19. However, for other pupils, teaching plans do not provide teachers with clear direction on what they should be teaching and when.

More recently, you and your mathematics leader introduced a new approach to the teaching of mathematics. Pupils with SEND and those who need to catch up are now learning well. However, there is sometimes a lack of ambition for pupils. Teachers are not using what they know about pupils' learning to adjust their curriculum plans. Consequently, pupils do not always reach their full potential.

The teaching of writing needs further attention. The content of the curriculum is not as well organised as it needs to be. There are no checks in place to make sure that pupils remember important knowledge and skills. Therefore, older pupils are not yet secure writers for a range of audiences and purposes. Leaders recognise further work is needed and have started to make suitable changes. The early signs are that these changes are having a positive impact.

Teachers' curriculum planning and use of assessment in other subjects, such as geography and history, are underdeveloped. Leaders regard this as an ongoing area for further improvement. There are plans in place to improve these subjects further.

Additional support

The trust has been instrumental in securing staffing, including senior leadership, for the school. Regular visits to the school by staff from the trust have ensured that leaders focus on the right things. For example, the implementation of a new mathematics curriculum.

The early reading leader has been working with the local English hub. Staff are using this additional support to develop their subject knowledge and expertise.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with the executive headteacher, assistant headteacher, subject leaders, a representative from the multi-academy trust, pupils from Year 6 and a group of staff.

I looked at pupils' work and reviewed documentation related to curriculum plans. I listened to pupils from Reception, Year 2 and Year 3 read to an adult.

I took account of correspondence from parents. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I reviewed the school's staff survey responses.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Middlemore
Her Majesty's Inspector