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Sarah Terrey
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Terrey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Catherine's Roman Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 11 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 full inspection in June 2019, there have been changes in the school's leadership. The interim executive headteacher left in December 2019. You took secondment to the post of headteacher in January 2020. You became the permanent headteacher in March 2020, the day before the first COVID-19 lockdown. Two teachers, including an early years leader, joined the school in

September 2020. A teacher left the school at the end of the spring term 2021. A current teacher took on the role of mathematics leader in January 2020.

The interim academy board was replaced by a local governing body, including a new chair of governors, in February 2021.

The school flooded in January 2020 and the roof was replaced over four classrooms. In one of the refurbished rooms, you have set up a library.

Main findings

Despite the flood and the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns, you have worked diligently to improve the school. Staff, pupils, and parents and carers appreciate your leadership. Morale is high, even though staff are having to deal with restructuring classes and the after-effects of the impact of COVID-19.

Reading is a priority in the school. The early years leader has retrained most teachers and teaching assistants in teaching phonics. As a result, younger pupils learn phonics systematically. However, due to the impact of recent lockdowns, the disruption to the learning of children in Reception is stark. Although most children can say the sounds for the early phases of phonics, too many are not able to write letters clearly. They do not hold pencils correctly. Some can write short words, but very few can write a simple sentence.

Older pupils, on the other hand, have improved their reading during COVID-19. They enjoy the new selection of books in the library. Year 6 pupils are writing and reading at an appropriate level.

The school is a member of the Department for Education's local hub in mathematics. The new leader of mathematics has received purposeful training from hub consultants. As a result, teachers have a better understanding of mathematics, and pupils learn more and remember more of the curriculum.

The curriculum in other subjects is at various stages of development. Older pupils are learning science that will help them in their transition to secondary school. In January 2020, you bought an 'off-the-shelf' package so that pupils were receiving some education in the wider curriculum. It provided activities, but not a curriculum of what pupils needed to know over time. Currently, pupils are not building on prior learning in some subjects in a way that will help them to know and remember more. The curriculum in many subjects is over-complicated, so impact is weak. Subject leaders are starting to plan more effectively.

You understand the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. Pupils with SEND receive effective support. Teachers spoke of the invaluable help you give them when considering the best ways to meet the needs of these pupils.

Pupils behave well. They display enthusiastic attitudes to learning. Pupils understand how to stay safe online. On the rare occasions that bullying takes place, pupils say that staff deal with it effectively.

Additional support

You value the strong and consistent support you receive from the trust. This has helped you decide on changes for the better in behaviour management as well as aspects of the curriculum in English and phonics.

Trust leaders appointed the interim academy board to guide and support governance following the inspection in June 2019. The new governing body continues to receive support from trust members while the governors are establishing themselves as an effective team.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the assistant headteacher, a trust representative, pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited lessons and looked at pupils' work and other documentation. I looked at the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and free-text responses, as well as staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathy Maddocks
Her Majesty's Inspector