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28 May 2021

Simon Millington
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Dear Mr Millington

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St James Church of England Junior School

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 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:

- identify gaps in pupils' knowledge in foundation subjects and adapt the curriculum to ensure that essential knowledge is prioritised.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in January 2018, the school appointed a new deputy headteacher in September 2019. The headteacher and a teacher left the school at the end of the autumn term 2020. An interim executive headteacher started work in January 2021. He has recently been appointed to the permanent position of executive headteacher. A new teacher started in January 2021. There have been four changes to membership of the governing body.

Main findings

Despite the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders and those with responsibility for governance remain committed to improving the quality of education for all pupils.

Reading is a priority for leaders. Pupils read every day and enjoy reading. During the third national lockdown, pupils who need additional support to read well did not make progress with their reading. Therefore, leaders have adapted the curriculum to provide extra help for pupils to improve their phonics knowledge. However, it is too soon to see how quickly pupils' early reading is improving.

Teachers choose high-quality books to help pupils find out about different writing styles. The English leader has adapted the curriculum so that pupils practise writing more frequently. Teachers support pupils to plan their writing carefully, which means that pupils are beginning to write with more complexity. Pupils' handwriting has improved as a result of regular practice. Staff effectively support pupils with English as an additional language, so pupils learn and use new words in their writing.

In English and mathematics, teachers have identified the knowledge that pupils forgot during national lockdowns. However, in other subjects, leaders do not know where pupils have gaps in their knowledge. For example, Year 6 pupils cannot compare features of rivers in geography because they could not remember important knowledge taught in Year 4. This means pupils are not able to build on the essential knowledge needed to make progress through the curriculum.

The special educational needs co-ordinator and teachers correctly identify pupils who need extra help with their learning. They carefully plan appropriate learning support for individuals and groups of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For example, pupils receive additional support sessions to help them recall important knowledge. Leaders frequently check that these pupils remember what they have been taught. Consequently, pupils with SEND are well supported.

Pupils' attendance has improved. Nevertheless, there remains a small number of pupils who are often absent from school. Leaders are determined to support all pupils to attend school regularly. For example, the family support worker makes

home visits to help families to solve problems that are preventing their child from attending school.

Leaders are focusing on the areas that will improve the quality of education for all pupils. They have taken appropriate action to adapt improvement plans. The governing body has acted to bring about sustainable change. For example, it has strengthened links with the feeder infant school to improve pupils' transition between the two schools.

Additional support

Leaders and those with responsibility for governance work effectively with external partners. Leaders have welcomed the support and challenge from the local authority. The executive headteacher and local authority adviser are currently working together to review the school's development plans in light of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

Teachers are making effective use of training and support from the local authority. For example, teachers are building their ability to improve pupils' communication skills. Subject leaders from a local school and sports coaches continue to work alongside teachers to strengthen their subject knowledge.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, the family support worker, teachers, pupils, representatives of those responsible for governance and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I reviewed the school improvement plan and documents relating to governance and the curriculum. I considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and staff questionnaires. I also observed pupils' learning and looked at pupils' work jointly with school leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Marie Thomas
Her Majesty's Inspector