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Rebecca Unsworth
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Dear Mrs Unsworth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Stephen and All Martyrs' CofE School, Lever Bridge

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:

- continue to plan carefully the important knowledge that pupils need to know in subjects other than English, mathematics and science
- ensure that all staff are fully trained in the new approach to the teaching of early reading

- enhance the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum so that pupils have more opportunities to learn about equality and diversity.

Context

You were appointed to the role of headteacher in September 2018, shortly before the last section 5 inspection. Several members of teaching and support staff have left the school since the previous inspection. Two new teachers have been appointed. The joint education board that was supporting the governing body concluded its work in summer 2019.

Main findings

You and other leaders have drawn up a suitable plan of action to address the areas for improvement that inspectors identified at the previous section 5 inspection in April 2019. The plan contains the appropriate priorities required to improve the school. It is sufficiently detailed and ambitious. You and other leaders regularly evaluate what you have achieved. There is secure evidence that leaders are improving the quality of education for pupils, for example in mathematics.

While you have maintained your focus on whole-school improvement during the COVID-19 pandemic, you have faced a number of additional challenges. For example, you have had to adapt the curriculum so that it can be delivered remotely. More recently, you have taken effective action to adjust the curriculum further. This is to address any missing knowledge that pupils have in their learning due to the impact of the pandemic. As a result, some other key improvements have not happened as quickly as you would have liked. For example, you were poised to implement new approaches to the teaching of PSHE just prior to the pandemic. These changes have only been introduced since March 2021. Consequently, some new initiatives are not as well developed as you planned by this time in your improvement journey.

An increasing number of curriculum plans in subjects such as English, mathematics and science are well developed. These plans are ambitious, carefully ordered and outline the core knowledge that pupils need to know and remember. Curriculum leaders have put strategies in place so that pupils revisit their learning regularly. This is so that pupils remember and use what they have learned over time. However, not all subjects are as well developed. For example, your curriculum plans in subjects such as history and geography do not contain all of the key knowledge that pupils must know and remember.

Since the previous section 5 inspection, you have implemented a new approach to teaching the mathematics curriculum. You are providing pupils with more opportunities to explain their learning and to practise their reasoning and problem-solving skills. Teachers are becoming more confident in delivering the mathematics

curriculum. This is because of the training they have completed. Pupils' learning and progress across the mathematics curriculum are improving.

You have established a whole-school approach to teaching phonics from the Reception class through to Year 2. However, this approach has only been fully implemented since all pupils returned to school in March 2021. This means that some staff are still building their confidence in delivering the new approach. That said, pupils who struggle with phonics, including some pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are being helped to catch up. There are early signs that the new phonics programme is building pupils' ability to recognise and use letters and the sounds they represent. Pupils are becoming more fluent readers.

Leaders have put effective ways of assessing pupils' learning in place. You now have an increasingly strong understanding of how successfully pupils are acquiring the knowledge, skills and understanding that they need across subjects. Teachers are also using assessment information much more effectively. They are ensuring that it tests the key knowledge that pupils must remember. Teachers are also using assessment information to plan activities that match more closely to pupils' needs. This is particularly the case for pupils with SEND.

You were asked to improve aspects of pupils' behaviour at the time of the previous inspection. You have successfully raised pupils' and staff's expectations of acceptable behaviour by re-establishing the behaviour policy and the school rules. Appropriate training has ensured that staff are equipped to manage pupils' behaviour effectively, including where pupils have personal, emotional, and additional educational needs. During the time that I was on site, I noticed that the routines to support effective learning have been re-established quickly. This meant that pupils behaved well in classrooms and around the school site. Pupils are eager learners. They are keen and confident to participate in lessons and they are not fazed by getting an answer wrong.

Pupils continue to benefit from opportunities in the curriculum to develop their self-esteem, confidence and positive attitudes toward themselves and others. At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to provide opportunities for pupils to better understand cultures and faiths other than their own. In March 2021, you introduced a new PSHE programme across the school. Despite this, pupils still do not know enough about equality of opportunity and the diversity of the world around them. You have, however, successfully put in place a relationships, sex and health education policy, following consultation with parents.

The effectiveness of the governing body is improving. Governors are increasingly confident in holding you and other leaders to account. They ask you more searching questions about key issues, including about the development of the curriculum.

Additional support

You are making the most of all the support available to you from the local authority and the Diocese of Manchester. Staff have benefited from support to develop their curriculum planning. This has helped them develop as teachers and curriculum leaders. Staff have also profited from support to develop how they manage pupils' behaviour. The expertise of the governing body has been enhanced by the work of the joint education board. This additional support, organised by the local authority and the Diocese of Manchester, has helped governors to gain a greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities. You have managed support effectively to ensure that staff receive the right help at the right time.

Evidence

During my visit, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, curriculum leaders, the reading leader and the member of staff who is responsible for maintaining the safeguarding checks on staff. I spoke with a member of the governing body by telephone and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection and the level of support that has been provided. I met with a group of pupils to ask them about their work and their experiences of school life.

I examined a variety of documentation, including: the school improvement plan; minutes of governing body meetings; curriculum plans; and documents connected to safeguarding. You and I carried out a series of joint visits to classrooms to look at learning and pupils' work in phonics and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector