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Susan Preston
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Dear Mrs Preston

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gillingham Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 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.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection, four new teachers joined the school. Changes were made to the leadership of English to include specific responsibility for early reading and phonics. The leadership of mathematics was changed in September

2020. The specialist resourced provision was redesignated from speech, language and communication to complex communication needs.

In light of the challenges faced with COVID-19, some actions in relation to curriculum development are not as advanced as leaders had intended.

Main findings

You have high expectations of both staff and pupils. You are working systematically to address the weaknesses identified at the time of the last section 5 inspection. Alongside this, you have reviewed the leadership of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Your plans for improvement are suitably detailed and focused on the right priorities. They demonstrate your ambition for the school and your determination to provide a purposeful curriculum for your pupils. Parents are highly supportive of the school.

Leaders prioritise pupils' reading. Children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 have books that match their reading ability. Those pupils who require further support get the help they need quickly. There is a real focus on the use of nursery rhymes and games in Reception Year to support reading development. Pupils, including those with SEND, are engaged fully in their learning. Accurate assessment ensures staff tackle any gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge swiftly.

You are building a curriculum based on the knowledge and skills pupils need to be successful. You prioritise improvements in pupils' reading, writing and mathematics. The development of other subjects is beginning to move at pace. Leaders ensure that staff understand how to select the key knowledge pupils need to remember. This is clearly evident in history, geography and science. Pupils are aware of the changes happening within the curriculum and talk positively about their learning. However, there is still work to do to ensure that the curriculum is carefully sequenced in all subjects.

Through increasing capacity in the leadership of SEND, you are ensuring that staff identify more accurately those pupils who require additional support. You are aware that further work in this area is necessary so that pupils with additional needs are supported effectively by staff.

Subject leaders are keen to improve. They are gaining in confidence in their own subject knowledge. This is helping them to support others. Curriculum leaders are well supported in their development and appreciate the time you provide for this. Consequently, this is building future leadership capacity.

Governors continue to be well informed about the school's work. They are becoming increasingly skilled in asking pertinent questions of leaders. As a result, they are more systematic in the way they work to ensure the school is focused on the right priorities.

Additional support

The local authority continues to provide helpful support and challenge for leaders. Regular contact enables leaders to discuss the impact of actions taken. The local authority, like you, know that the next priority is to develop an effective curriculum in every subject that helps pupils prepare for their next stage in education.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders including the special educational needs coordinator, the school business manager, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, listened to pupils read and reviewed school documentation, including governor minutes. I looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and 28 free-text responses, as well as 13 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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

Heather Barraclough
Her Majesty's Inspector