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Ian Jones
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Dear Mr Jones

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Burnley

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 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. 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 teachers use assessment information more effectively so that they help pupils to build on what they already know and can do.

Context

Since September 2020, the disruption caused by the pandemic has continued to impact on your plans to improve the school.

Since the previous inspection, you have made some changes to subject leader roles to make better use of staff expertise. The nursery provision at the school closed in September 2020.

Main findings

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, you have remained determined to make the improvements that inspectors identified at the previous inspection. Without delay, you and other leaders developed appropriate plans to bring about the necessary change. Together with staff, you took the opportunity to go 'back to the drawing board' with the school's curriculum. Your clear vision to ensure that children and pupils benefit from an ambitious and well-planned curriculum has guided the work of leaders. As a result, subject leaders are well on their way in reviewing and redesigning their curriculum plans.

Subject leaders have acted to strengthen their own subject knowledge and curriculum expertise. In each subject, leaders have set out clearly what pupils need to know and be able to do, including in the early years. Much of this work was completed in the months following the inspection. Teachers had started to deliver these new curriculums when the first national lockdown began in March 2020. Understandably, this first lockdown and subsequent disruptions caused by COVID-19 delayed the full implementation of the new curriculum. That said, you and the school's staff have acted quickly to get back on track, despite the continuing challenges of the pandemic.

Following the previous inspection, teachers have been able to benefit from appropriate training to deliver the English curriculum. They use high-quality texts that engage pupils' interest and enrich further their vocabulary. Pupils use these texts as a starting point for their reading and writing. Most of the pupils that I spoke with during the inspection told me about different writing styles. They spoke confidently about adjectives and adverbs, and how they use these to improve their writing. Pupils are proud of the written work that is in many of their books.

Throughout the pandemic, you and the school's leaders have continued to prioritise reading. For example, you have increased the range of books available for the youngest pupils and children in the early years to read. Staff are using these books effectively to help children and pupils to practise and apply their knowledge of phonics. Teachers keep a careful check on children and pupils' reading. This is especially the case for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with special

educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who have fallen behind. These pupils can benefit from additional support that is helping them to catch up.

In other subjects such as science, history and geography, teachers are beginning to use leaders' curriculum plans to design lessons that help to build pupils' knowledge systematically. Subject leaders are in the process of checking that teachers use assessment information effectively to inform the delivery of the curriculum. Due to the impact of COVID-19, some subject leaders are further along this journey than others. As a result, in some subjects, there are times when teachers do not use assessment information well to help pupils to build on what they have learned previously.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to ensure that pupils develop a wider awareness and understanding of difference, including sexual orientation. Although staff have been able to benefit from appropriate training on how to deliver the relationships education curriculum, the disruptions caused by COVID-19 have slowed down your plans in this area. My discussions with older pupils showed that they understood the negative consequences of actions, such as name calling. That said, they had a limited knowledge of protected characteristics.

You provide governors with accurate information about the school. As a result, members of the governing body are well informed. Their support and challenge are making a positive contribution to the school's improvement journey. Throughout the pandemic, governors have made the well-being of staff and pupils a priority. At the same time, they have maintained a sharp focus on leaders' work to review and improve the school's curriculum.

Additional support

The local authority has provided a wide range of support to the school. You acknowledge how effective this support has been in helping leaders to develop the curriculum. For instance, teachers appreciate the ongoing training provided by the local authority to support their delivery of the English curriculum. More recently, the local authority has reduced the level of support provided. This reflects the ability of you and other leaders to bring about further improvements independently.

You, other school leaders, and governors have valued the training provided by the diocese on relationships education and health education. This training is enabling you to develop your plans to enhance further the planning and delivery of this curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders, pupils, representatives of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I examined a variety of documentation, including leaders' improvement plans; minutes of governing body meetings; subject curriculum plans and documents relating to safeguarding. I reviewed the 15 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including nine responses to Ofsted's free-text facility. I also reviewed the 24 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Alongside curriculum leaders, I also carried out a series of visits to classrooms and observed a small group of pupils reading to a trusted adult.

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

Yours sincerely

Garry White
Her Majesty's Inspector