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Tracy Edwards and Michael Lawrence
Headteachers
Elmhurst Junior School
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Dear Mrs Edwards and Mr Lawrence

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Elmhurst Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 20 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

The two co-headteachers have both announced their intention to retire at the end of this academic year. A new headteacher has been appointed for September 2021.

Main findings

You will both leave the school in July 2021. Even so, you are continuing to make changes to the curriculum that you began last year. Staff remain fully committed to the priorities that you have set out in your improvement plans.

Teachers and teaching assistants are putting their recent phonics training into practice. Consequently, pupils who need help to learn to read are getting it, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They are starting to catch up well. Older pupils say that they enjoy reading. Teachers encourage pupils to read and regularly celebrate pupils' success, for example during assemblies.

You intend to use pupils' improved reading skills to improve their writing. Pupils are not always challenged well enough to use a wide range of vocabulary or different types of sentences. The training you have planned for teachers to address this has not happened yet.

Subject leaders understand their role in defining the knowledge that the school expects pupils to learn. However, senior leaders' coaching for subject leaders has been delayed due to the COVID-19 restrictions. This has slowed the development of detailed and well-sequenced plans in different subjects.

Teachers assess pupils' knowledge accurately in English and mathematics. For example, teachers regularly check pupils' phonic knowledge in detail. They evaluate pupils' mathematical understanding well. Teachers provide effective support for the pupils who need most help. However, in other subjects, teachers' understanding of what pupils know is not as detailed because the goals of the curriculum are not set out as clearly.

You have improved the school's personal, social and health education programme. This includes teaching pupils about their mental health and the importance of respectful relationships. Staff are using their expertise, along with their understanding of the local community, to develop further this area of the curriculum.

Parents recognise the impact of the work you have done since the previous inspection. Most parents say that you communicate with them well. Virtually all of the parents who responded to the Ofsted Parent View survey would recommend this school to another parent.

The governing body has successfully managed the appointment of your successor. Governors understand the urgency of the work that still needs to be done to improve the school further.

Additional support

The school has not been able to access external support effectively during the pandemic. The school improvement adviser's visits have been online and often limited in what they can offer. Further local authority support has not been possible due to the pandemic. Even so, individual staff have drawn on ideas and advice from colleagues in local schools. They are building these ideas into their curriculum plans.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, subject leaders and governors to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met a sample of pupils and I heard some pupils reading with their teaching assistant. I had a phone call with a representative of the local authority and looked at a range of documents, including the school's plans for improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector