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Dear Miss O'Reilly

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Willowdown Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 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 and prioritise, in their curriculum planning, the essential knowledge subject leaders want pupils to know and remember.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in June 2019, an early years leader, an English leader and two teachers have joined the school. The chair of governors took up post in September 2019.

Main findings

Leaders are addressing the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection effectively. Despite the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders have continued to drive forward school improvement.

In the early years, the curriculum rightly focuses on the development of children's communication skills. All children in the early years practise their speaking and listening regularly. Children who need extra help, for example those who speak English as an additional language, are benefiting from daily support to improve these skills. However, there are fewer opportunities for pupils in Years 4 to 6 to practise and improve their speaking and listening.

Although leaders have invested in suitable books for early readers, staff do not always match reading books well to pupils' phonic knowledge. Some pupils' phonic knowledge is weak. These pupils do not say all their letter sounds correctly. This makes it difficult for them to read. Staff have attended training to improve their knowledge of phonics.

Pupils enjoy reading, especially to Buddy, the school dog. Pupils talk enthusiastically about books they read in class with their teacher. Teachers choose class books carefully to build pupils' knowledge of different types of writing. The English leader is currently checking how well these books support pupils' writing development.

Teachers have a sound knowledge of the writing curriculum. Pupils learn to use accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar. Teachers help pupils to think about the content of their writing. The leader of English is currently working with teachers to help make pupils' writing even better.

Teachers check where pupils have gaps in their mathematical knowledge. They use this information to adjust subject plans to ensure that pupils study all areas of the mathematics curriculum. However, some leaders of other subjects have not yet identified the essential knowledge they want pupils to learn, so they cannot identify where pupils have gaps in their knowledge.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Their additional needs are swiftly identified. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) ensures that staff know how best to support pupils with SEND. She works effectively with a wide range of outside agencies. As a result, pupils have appropriate support that accurately matches their needs.

Since the previous section 5 inspection, pupils' attendance has improved. However, a small number of pupils are often absent from school. Some of these pupils have long-term health needs that prevent them from attending school. Leaders work closely with health and social care services to ensure that these pupils miss as little learning as possible.

The behaviour of pupils has improved. Staff and pupils treat each other with respect. There are clear routines and staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. As a result, pupils' behaviour is calm and focused in the classroom. Pupils move around the school safely. Nevertheless, following the first national lockdown, some pupils found the return to school difficult. Despite leaders' efforts, some of these pupils were unable to follow the COVID-19 safety rules. Consequently, the number of fixed-term exclusions increased at the beginning of this academic year. These pupils are now benefiting from additional support from outside agencies.

Leaders and governors know how to continue to improve the school. Governors and trustees robustly challenge leaders. They frequently review the impact of school improvement plans. The headteacher ensures that all staff know how to carry out the planned improvements to the curriculum.

Additional support

Leaders have carefully selected external partners who can help staff to develop their subject knowledge. Staff have benefited from working with an English Hub, an external mathematics adviser and the Somerset Literacy Network. Leaders are determined to continue school improvement by actively seeking additional expert support. For example, the SENCo commissions an occupational therapist to work with pupils and staff.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the multi-academy trust's chief executive officer and director of primary school improvement, pupils, staff and the chair of the local governing body to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection.

I observed pupils learning, looked at their work and reviewed school documents. I looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and to the staff survey.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the Clevedon Learning Trust, 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

Marie Thomas
Her Majesty's Inspector