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Jon Barr and Debbie Fisher
Co-Headteachers
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Dear Mr Barr and Mrs Fisher

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Barnabas Church of England VC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 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 identify the important knowledge and skills pupils need at each stage of their learning in the wider curriculum subjects.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, the leadership structure has changed. There are two co-headteachers who lead the school. Three new governors have joined the school, including a foundation governor.

You identified that some pupils' early writing skills fell back due to the impact of COVID-19. Many of the youngest pupils did not have regular opportunities to practise writing during remote learning.

Main findings

Leaders and governors are working on the right priorities to improve the quality of education. Your improvement plan is precise. There are frequent checks on how well pupils are learning in a range of subjects. You are determined to create a well-sequenced and ambitious curriculum. This is beginning to take shape. However, curriculum plans in some subjects are still evolving.

Leaders' efforts to improve the mathematics curriculum are paying off. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can learn and do. Pupils are confident when explaining their mathematical thinking. Work in pupils' books shows they have a better understanding of a wide range of mathematical vocabulary.

You have created a positive reading culture. Staff are well trained in how phonics is taught. Leaders ensure that pupils in Reception and key stage 1 read books that are well-matched to the sounds they are learning in class. This helps pupils to develop their confidence and reading fluency. You are using additional catch-up funding to support pupils who struggle to read. This is already making a noticeable difference.

Due to disruption caused by COVID-19, many of the youngest pupils are struggling to write at the expected standard. Teachers are providing extra handwriting and mark-marking activities to help them catch up. It is too soon to see the impact of this recent work.

The special educational needs and disabilities coordinator and the pastoral staff are skilled in supporting pupils' social and academic needs. For example, pupils receive timely and effective support to help them become better readers. Additionally, teaching assistants are quick to intervene when pupils need extra help. Parents are positive about the support that leaders provide for their children's individual needs.

You recently introduced a new system for supporting pupils' behaviour. There are early indications that pupils' behaviour is improving. Nevertheless, you continue to refine the new approach to ensure that the recent improvements are sustained over time.

Governors have a shared understanding of the school's strengths and areas to improve. They are beginning to widen their focus from English and mathematics to different subjects in the curriculum. Consequently, governors are better placed to find out how well the wider curriculum is developing so that pupils know more and remember more over time.

Additional support

You have made effective use of additional support. A local trust has worked with your staff to introduce a new system for behaviour. Teachers have continued to access local English and mathematics hubs to strengthen their subject knowledge.

The local authority provides helpful support to new governors to assist them in carrying out their roles effectively. The local authority has also secured a specialist leader of education to support the improvement of writing. The school improvement officer continues to work with you on the implementation of the curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders and staff. I held a meeting with representatives of those responsible for governance and a local authority representative to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I reviewed documents provided by the school and looked at samples of pupils' work. I met with a group of pupils, visited lessons and listened to pupils read to an adult. I considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the staff questionnaire.

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

Yours sincerely

Dale Burr
Her Majesty's Inspector