

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 June 2021

Laura Newark
Headteacher
Sir Robert Hitcham Church of England Voluntary Aided School
School Corner
Debenham
Stowmarket
Suffolk
IP14 6PL

Dear Miss Newark

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sir Robert Hitcham Church of England Voluntary Aided School

Following my visit to your school on 27 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 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 ensure:

- teachers have the skills to help pupils remember more over time
- subject leaders develop a thorough understanding of the quality of their subjects across the foundation stage and key stages 1 and 2
- the needs of all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well considered and planned for, and that teaching is suitably adapted
- the training of staff has an impact on improving pupils' early reading and the early skills of writing on paper
- reading books closely match pupils' phonics knowledge.

Context

Since the inspection in June 2019, the previous headteacher has left. An interim headteacher was in place for the autumn term 2019. You started as headteacher in January 2020. A senior teacher and a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) have been appointed from within the school staff.

Suffolk local authority dissolved the previous governing body and put an intervention executive board in place for a year. A new governing body has been in place since April 2020.

Main findings

Leaders' plans for improvement are clear and timely. Some priorities have changed following the periods when schools were only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions. For example, pupils' writing fell behind where it should have been, so this is now a key action. The school has started the improvement journey although there is more to do.

Leaders took the opportunity of the first national lockdown to work on the curriculum. With support from external partners, subject leaders developed plans for Year 1 to Year 6. These are detailed and show what knowledge, skills and vocabulary should be taught in each year group for each unit in subjects such as history, music, and design and technology.

It is now clearer to teachers what they should be teaching. They know the importance of building on pupils' prior learning. Some teachers are more skilled than others in knowing how to help pupils build up their long-term memory of information so that pupils can remember more over time.

Subject leaders are beginning to develop their roles. They are accessing training to help them understand how to support colleagues in delivering their subjects more

effectively. Work is needed to expand subject plans through from the early years to key stage 1.

In English, again working with external support, leaders have rewritten the curriculum. There is a greater focus on pupils reading a wide range of texts, including those from other cultures. Work is blocked into two- to three-week units to enable pupils to build up the skills needed for a purposeful piece of writing.

Pupils say that they enjoy reading. The quality of teaching of phonics is variable though, depending on staff skills. Those staff who have already been trained by the English hub are more confident and skilled. Pupils practise writing. More of this should be sitting at a table and on paper to develop good posture for writing. Some early reading books do not help pupils develop their phonics skills. However, an order is on its way to refresh the books in early June 2021.

The provision for pupils with SEND has begun to improve, but there is still a lot to do to make sure that provision in each classroom is of high enough quality. The new SENCo has made sure that annual reviews are completed appropriately and is starting to monitor interventions.

The behaviour of the majority of pupils is now good. They listen carefully, work hard, and play happily with their friends at breaks in the spacious grounds.

Additional support

Leaders work closely with external partners, both from the local authority and other independent consultants. They also receive support from the Angles mathematics hub and the Wensum English hub. As a result, staff have accessed professional development. Where they have had this, staff are using it to improve their teaching.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, senior teacher, SENCo, subject leaders and other members of staff to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with members of the governing body.

I visited lessons alongside senior leaders and looked at pupils' work. I observed lunchtime and spoke to a group of pupils.

I considered the 33 new responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 12 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.

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

Yours sincerely

Tessa Holledge
Her Majesty's Inspector