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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Sean Kavanagh
Headteacher
Broom Cottages Primary & Nursery School
Broom Road
Ferryhill
County Durham
DL17 8AN

Dear Mr Kavanagh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Broom Cottages Primary & Nursery 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:

- check the implementation of the wider curriculum to ensure that pupils experience an ambitious curriculum across all subjects
- ensure that the assessment of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is used effectively to inform the curriculum they experience and the support they receive.

Context

There have been no significant changes of staffing since the previous inspection. The ability of leaders and governors to check the impact of the curriculum has been restricted by COVID-19.

Main findings

You and your team have continued to address areas for improvement. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, members of staff have developed the curriculum. They have done this while providing extra support for pupils. Staff feel well supported by leaders in their actions to improve the school.

Your mathematics leader has worked with a local mathematics hub to improve the curriculum. He has modelled teaching approaches to staff and brought in new resources. This is contributing to more consistent curriculum delivery and is supporting pupils to build a better understanding of number. Pupils are progressing to more challenging work in the mathematics curriculum.

Your phonics leader continues to develop pupils' early reading. She works with a consultant to check the consistency of phonics teaching. The effect of this work was evident in lesson visits. Teachers model letters and sounds well. Pupils benefit from consistent routines. Despite these approaches, leaders are aware that a large number of pupils have fallen behind in phonics. This has been exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions. Leaders have put support in place to help these pupils. This will continue to be a priority in the months ahead.

Your teachers have made changes to what pupils read in class. They have introduced texts that provide pupils with a wider experience of styles and genres. These texts are providing pupils with greater curriculum challenge and interest. Leaders are also directing pupils to explore texts in greater depth. Such initiatives are improving the reading culture in the school.

A significant proportion of pupils have SEND. Some of these pupils found remote education difficult when they had to learn from home due to COVID-19. This has led some of these pupils to fall further behind in the curriculum. Teachers are working with a range of external partners to provide extra support for pupils. Your team has

also placed pupils in specific groups to offer focused help. In some cases, assessments of pupils' abilities are not matched closely enough to their curriculum needs. Assessment practices do not consistently inform leaders how the curriculum should be adapted to better meet pupils' needs.

Members of your safeguarding team have made pupils' well-being a priority. They have taken purposeful action to check that pupils are safe. They have worked with families and external partners to provide extra help. The overwhelming majority of parents, who made their views known, value the support of school staff. There are signs that better communication with parents is contributing to better levels of attendance.

The pupils I talked to feel safe and well supported. They believe teachers look after them and respond to any concerns that they may have. Pupils describe how their teachers encourage them to read. They also explain how teachers are helping them to remember important knowledge.

You have taken additional action to check the quality of education. You work with subject leaders to check how well curriculum plans are covered. You have reviewed the science curriculum and have plans in place to review other subjects. COVID-19 has interrupted this process. Work in pupils' books shows that the curriculum is more developed in some subjects than in others. For example, science books show signs that pupils study important topics over time. In history, pupils' coverage of topics such as the Vikings is less comprehensive. You have had limited opportunities for external partners to provide you with assurance of the quality of education that pupils receive.

Governors have carried out training to help them check leaders' work more effectively. They have asked you to provide more regular snapshots of improvement actions. They are aware of the work you are doing to review reading and the quality of the mathematics curriculum. Governors are also mindful of your actions to keep children safe. A governor has plans to look into staff well-being and governors are keen to secure the views of teachers.

Additional support

Leaders of phonics and mathematics are drawing on the support of external experts. This work is helping to improve the curriculum in these areas.

Your staff have worked with local authority networks to develop the curriculum in other subjects, including history and geography. New subject leaders in art and technology have also worked with local networks to develop curriculum materials.

Leaders, including governors, have had limited opportunities to get external views of the quality of education due to COVID-19.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and your deputy headteacher. We discussed the actions taken to improve the school since the last inspection. I met subject leaders and your special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). I undertook lesson visits in English and mathematics. I discussed attendance and aspects of safeguarding with members of your safeguarding team. I met some Year 6 pupils to discuss behaviour, safety and the curriculum. I held a discussion with members of the governing body, including the chair. Two governors attended in person while others joined the meeting remotely. I also held a remote discussion with your improvement partner from the local authority. I looked at curriculum plans and at some examples of work in pupils' books.

I considered 21 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 34 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including 19 free-text responses.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector