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Jane Thomas
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Thomas

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Matthew's 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 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school 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 that leaders' plans to strengthen the curriculum for phonics are implemented effectively so that pupils quickly develop the skills they need to become fluent and confident readers.

Context

At the time of this inspection, one Reception class and two members of staff were isolating because of COVID-19.

Between March 2020 and March 2021, the deputy headteacher took on the role of acting headteacher.

Main findings

You are working with other leaders to tackle the areas for improvement that were identified at the previous inspection. You have a plan in place that sets out the steps you are taking to improve the quality of education for all pupils.

Following the previous inspection, you provided training for staff to develop their skills as subject leaders. Subject leaders have worked in teams to look carefully at what pupils should learn in each subject from early years through to Year 6. Leaders have revised the school's curriculum in all subjects and have developed new curriculum plans. These plans make clear what pupils can and should achieve in each year group. They help teachers build on what pupils have learned before. Teachers know what leaders expect of pupils' learning and achievement in each subject. Leaders are using these plans to monitor the quality of education across the school.

New curriculum plans for the foundation subjects have been in place since September. Subject leaders are providing training and support for staff so that they feel confident to teach these subjects well. Subject leaders have clear ideas about what they will do to check that the new curriculum is having a positive impact on pupils' achievement. However, the pandemic has slowed the implementation of the new curriculum for the foundation subjects. It is too early to see what difference the curriculum is making to improve the quality of education in all subjects.

You have strengthened the procedures for sharing information between staff when pupils move to the next year group or key stage. Consequently, teachers have a clear understanding of the needs of the pupils in their class before the start of the next school year. This has been particularly important to help teachers address the gaps in pupils' knowledge that have occurred as a result of the pandemic.

Leaders have plans in place to strengthen the curriculum for phonics. They are supporting staff to make sure that phonics and reading are taught more systematically. You have recently bought new books that appropriately match the sounds that pupils are learning. You are ensuring that staff have access to the resources and training they need to teach phonics consistently well. Work to improve the curriculum for phonics so that more pupils achieve well in reading is at an early stage. Leaders know that there is more work to do to ensure that all pupils develop the skills they need to decode texts confidently and become fluent readers.

Governors are clear about their responsibilities and have the appropriate skills and knowledge to carry them out effectively. Governors know the school well. They provide challenge to school leaders for the work they are doing to improve the school and hold them to account. They ensure that leaders remain focused on improving the quality of education for all pupils

Additional support

You meet regularly with the Luton school improvement team to review the progress the school is making towards becoming a good school. Recently leaders worked with a local authority adviser to carry out a review of the school's provision for phonics and early reading. This review has helped leaders identify what more they need to do to improve this aspect of leaders' work.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and other leaders to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I met with the chair of governors and other representatives of the governing body. I met with the local authority school improvement adviser.

I looked at the school's improvement plan, visited lessons with leaders, and observed pupils reading. I met with the leaders for English, early years and phonics to discuss the work they are doing to improve the teaching of phonics and reading. I explored with the subject leaders for art, geography, history, and science the work they have been doing to improve the school's curriculum. I met with the special educational needs coordinator and the inclusion lead. I looked at the single central register of the checks that are made when staff are appointed. I met with the team responsible for attendance. I reviewed the 18 responses and 13 free-text comments that were submitted to Ofsted's Parent View and feedback from 75 members of staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Katherine Douglas
Her Majesty's Inspector