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Lindsey Clarke
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Clarke

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Rowlands Gill Community 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:

- establish systematic approaches to monitoring and evaluating the quality of education. These approaches should encompass the work of governors, senior leaders and curriculum leaders

- refine the school's early reading programme by ensuring that pupils, particularly those in the early stages of reading, are provided with books to read at home that precisely match their phonics knowledge
- remodel the early years curriculum, so that learning activities ensure that children progress smoothly from the Nursery to the Reception and on into Year 1. The remodelled curriculum should ensure that children progressively develop their knowledge and skills in reading, writing and mathematics, and secure a grounding across other subjects in readiness for Year 1.

Context

There have been no changes to the school's senior leadership since the last inspection. A new early years leader has been recruited and will take up post in September 2021. A temporary teacher is continuing to teach Year 3.

Main findings

Senior leaders are taking the fundamental steps needed to improve the school. You have appropriate improvement plans in place. The school has come through the national lockdown in January and February well. During this time, you made some adaptations to your curriculum. Consequently, you are using this term to ensure you teach any content that was missed. You are working hard to help the pupils who found remote learning difficult to catch up. After some turbulent years, your settled leadership is appreciated by the staff and the community. Parents have noticed changes for the better and now have more confidence in the school.

You have made sound progress in improving the curriculum. You have reviewed planning in each subject. Teachers began teaching new schemes of work last September. Wherever possible, you have tried to teach subject knowledge in the planned sequence, albeit remotely for part of the year. Teachers teach each subject discretely. This is helping pupils to develop a sound foundation of subject-specific knowledge. Content is more ambitious, and expectations are rising. However, curriculum plans do not make clear what knowledge pupils are expected to know by the end of each topic. This would help teachers to emphasize the most essential knowledge. It is also unclear what strategies teachers should use to help pupils remember the most essential knowledge.

History is a subject that you feel has improved. I talked to some pupils about the subject. Pupils could recall some facts but struggled to remember much of the knowledge covered without checking their books. Pupils could not explain concepts such as slavery, indicating that some important knowledge about Roman Britain had not been understood.

The challenges of the pandemic mean that you do not have a clear picture as to whether your curriculum plans are working. You have resumed training your

curriculum leaders so that they can check if pupils are learning more. Likewise, COVID-19 has prevented the governors from checking whether leaders are improving the quality of education. Going forwards, you recognise that leaders and governors need better systems to check whether pupils are knowing and remembering more.

The teaching of reading is progressing well. Your phonics programme begins in earnest from the start of the Reception Year. Staff have had the relevant training to teach phonics well and pupils engage in phonics sessions enthusiastically. Adults who listen to pupils read are skilled in helping them to read fluently. However, the books provided for pupils to read at home come from a different phonics programme. This risks pupils encountering words they cannot decode, which could confuse and undermine their confidence.

Teachers know which pupils have fallen behind this year. You are providing extra tuition for them. In Year 3, for example, pupils who were not fully secure in their phonics knowledge have had extra help. Almost all have caught up quickly. More widely, you have a coherent approach to developing reading skills across key stage 2. Pupils read every day. They experience a good selection of fiction and non-fiction texts and get to read whole books.

You have successfully recruited a teacher to lead the early years. You have decided to split early years provision into separate Nursery and Reception classes. In part, this reflects an increase in numbers from September. You also feel that separate classes can provide sharper teaching that better prepares children for formal schooling in Year 1. Developing suitable curriculum planning for this new approach is therefore a priority for the summer term.

The last inspection noted that some lessons were disrupted by poor behaviour. You have addressed this. Your behaviour policy is well understood. Pupils know the rewards and sanctions and respond to these. This is ensuring the climate around school is calm and orderly.

The school is meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) more effectively. You have overhauled your approach. Your support plans provide teachers with clear guidance on how to support these pupils. You review these plans more frequently and involve parents more in decisions. To ensure pupils remain in COVID-19 secure 'bubbles', pupils in the additionally resourced mainstream school provision are currently not able to join mainstream lessons. When you can, you intend to reintegrate these pupils into the normal life of the school.

You have kept the governors well informed about developments in school. Some governors have managed to provide effective scrutiny, albeit remotely. However, governors have been less successful in checking the impact of changes to the curriculum and the developments in early years education.

Additional support

The local authority is providing a generous level of support. Leaders have drawn upon the support of subject consultants to develop the curriculum within subjects and to shape the new approach in the early years. The local authority is also challenging. It is systematically holding you and the governors to account for improving the school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, curriculum leaders for reading and history, and a group of pupils. I also met the deputy headteacher in his capacity as the special educational needs coordinator. I met with the chair and other members of the governing body and spoke to a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited lessons in the Nursery and Reception classes and in key stage 1 to observe the teaching of phonics. I observed adults reading one-to-one with pupils. I visited some guided reading sessions in key stage 2. I also scrutinized some pupils' history books, the minutes of governing body meetings and some examples of support plans for pupils with SEND. I considered the 18 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 81 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's parent survey.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector