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Dear Mr Kaye

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Christ Church Church of England First School

Following my visit to your school on 12 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 not taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics improves, so that all pupils learn the essential phonic knowledge they need to read well and spell words accurately
- Reception children and Year 1 pupils have a curriculum that meets their needs and prepares them for their next stage of education
- pupils' behaviour in lessons improves, so that pupils learn equally well in all classes.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, there have been two staff changes. Sadly, one of these changes was due to the sudden and recent death of a class teacher.

Main findings

Leaders' strategic plans set out how they intend to improve the quality of education. However, leaders are not taking sufficient action to bring these improvements about. Governors meet with leaders to discuss their current work. However, governors are not yet holding leaders to account precisely enough for improving the quality of education pupils receive. The impact of leaders' actions is too limited.

At the two most recent section 5 inspections, inspectors identified that the teaching of phonics needed to improve. Leaders are not remedying these weaknesses quickly enough. Leaders have invested in new reading books for pupils. They also ensure that staff provide additional help for some pupils at the early stages of learning to read, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, leaders do not oversee what is being taught and learned precisely enough in classes. Staff's subject knowledge is not secure enough. Leaders are not ensuring that all pupils, regardless of age or ability, learn the essential phonic knowledge they need. As a result, pupils are falling behind. Too few pupils can read and spell words accurately.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified weaknesses in the early years curriculum. Leaders have done too little to bring improvements about. Leaders are not ensuring that all pupils, including those with SEND, in Reception and Year 1 receive the curriculum they need to thrive. As a result, the youngest children cannot sustain their learning and lose concentration quickly. Pupils' learning is often disrupted. This is preventing pupils from learning the curriculum they need in order to be well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Conversely, in Nursery, there is a precise focus on developing children's early language and speaking skills. Staff skilfully extend children's talk and vocabulary. These children are learning the curriculum well.

Leaders have an acute focus on identifying and supporting pupils and families who need help. Leaders and staff work closely with external agencies to support pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs well. Staff are very attentive to these aspects of the pastoral needs of all pupils.

Leaders' work to improve teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics is proving effective. As a result, teachers' plans are increasingly well organised and cover the essential knowledge pupils need to learn, particularly in Years 2, 3 and 4.

Subject leaders' plans outline what they need to do to improve each curriculum subject. They are showing a strong commitment to this work. As a result, this work is building momentum. For example, in science, there is now a clear plan of what will be taught and when.

Additional support

The school has received a range of additional support over a sustained period. For example, leaders have worked with the local authority, a national leader of education (NLE), and with English and mathematics hubs. However, some of the planned external support is delayed because of COVID-19. The local authority holds meetings with school leaders and governors to discuss the actions that leaders are taking to improve the school. Leaders are working with a cluster of local middle and first schools to design curriculum plans across a range of foundation subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders. I met with pupils and staff. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of Somerset local authority, a representative of the Diocese of Bath and Wells, and an NLE to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also held a telephone conversation with the chair of governors.

I visited lessons, including reading catch-up sessions, and I reviewed pupils' work. I reviewed a wide range of documents, including the school's action plans.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector