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Kathleen Hinton
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Dear Mrs Hinton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Darlaston

Following my visit to your school on 19 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.

Context

There have been considerable changes in school leadership since the previous section 5 inspection. An additional assistant headteacher has now joined the senior leadership team. This additional assistant headteacher was employed from within the school and started in post in September 2020. In addition, a deputy headteacher and a key stage 1 leader joined the school in September 2020. The key stage 1 leader is also responsible for leading writing. The early years leader left in February 2021. The early years foundation stage is now jointly led by the deputy headteacher and key stage 1 leader.

Main findings

The school has improved since the previous section 5 inspection. Your diligent leadership is the reason for many positive changes. You have built a new leadership team that works together well. Leaders have an accurate view of the school. They know what needs doing to further improve the school. Leaders communicate effectively with, and ensure, staff understand what needs improving. Staff are committed to improving the quality of education. Their morale is high.

Governors contribute effectively to the school's work. They have increased their focus on monitoring the actions that leaders take. Individual governors regularly review specific elements of school improvement work. They meet with leaders to discuss the difference that this work is making and provide reports to the governing body. Consequently, governors have the information that they need to ask searching questions and hold leaders to account. However, the school development plan is not helpful to governors. This plan does not include specific information about how and when the school's priorities will be checked.

Leaders have ensured that all pupils, including those with special education needs and/or disabilities, access the full curriculum. For example, they have taken steps to reduce the number of times that pupils who need extra help leave lessons to work with adults. When staff do provide extra support away from classrooms, leaders make sure that adults have good reasons for doing this.

Leaders have worked hard to improve the quality of education in mathematics. They ensure that curriculum plans include lessons that build on what pupils have learned before. In addition, leaders ensure that teachers know how to teach the mathematics curriculum well. As a result, teachers are more consistent in the way that they teach mathematics. For example, they plan enough time in lessons for pupils to practise new methods that they learn. Teachers also give pupils short daily practice sessions to remind them of essential knowledge they have already covered. This is helping pupils to know and remember more.

Leaders took effective action to improve pupils' writing after the last section 5 inspection. This action included adopting a new approach for teaching pupils to

write. Leaders recognised the need to develop teachers' confidence in teaching writing. Staff who benefitted from expert training coached and shared good practice with others. Curriculum plans are now clear about what pupils need to know to become better writers in each year group. Staff from different year groups regularly work together to discuss pupils' writing. This has strengthened their confidence in assessing pupils' writing ability. This assessment information helps teachers to adapt lessons and identify pupils who need extra support.

At the last monitoring inspection, you were asked to urgently help pupils who had fallen behind in learning to read. You responded quickly by prioritising the teaching of phonics in the early years and key stage 1. Leaders organised for an additional high-level teaching assistant to work with children of Reception age. This arrangement has reduced the size of phonics groups and allowed staff to provide more targeted support. In addition, leaders decided to provide extra phonics lessons for all pupils in Year 1. These phonics lessons are helping more and more pupils to catch up in learning to read.

Curriculum leaders are working effectively to improve the quality of the curriculum in foundation subjects. Leaders have identified the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn to progress in these subjects. However, they have developed some subjects more than others. Work in some subjects has been delayed because of coronavirus. For instance, work to improve the art and design curriculum has been paused until September 2021.

Leaders have taken recent action to improve the quality of education in the early years. The learning environment is now bright, vibrant and well resourced. Curriculum leaders are beginning to think more carefully about what children must learn in the early years to prepare them for Year 1. In addition, leaders are supporting teachers to develop their expertise. This is helping teachers to think about how activities can help children to build their learning over time. However, this work is fairly new and is not yet embedded.

Additional support

Leaders have been supported by the Archdiocese of Birmingham and Walsall local authority. The Archdiocese of Birmingham has also brokered support from a national leader of education. This support has helped leaders to focus on the right improvement priorities. As a result, it is helping leaders to improve the quality of education that is being provided. As leaders have grown in confidence, their reliance on additional support has decreased over time.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, curriculum leaders and pupils. I also discussed the actions taken since the last inspection with

representatives of those responsible for governance, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

I examined the school's single central record of background checks on staff. I also reviewed the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan and minutes of governing body meetings. I looked at curriculum plans alongside pupils' workbooks. I reviewed responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text responses, and 18 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Leonard
Her Majesty's Inspector