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18 June 2021

Sheryl Slack
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Slack

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 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 one judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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:

- ensure that, in those most recently implemented subjects, leaders support teachers to design learning that builds upon what pupils know already
- develop further the expertise of the governing body so that they can hold leaders to account fully for their actions to improve the curriculum.

Context

In September 2020, the school extended its early years provision to admit two- and three-year-olds, and a nursery teacher was appointed.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you and the head of school have continued to focus on school improvement. For example, you have prioritised training for staff to allow them to deliver more ambitious and well-designed subject curriculums. Staff told me that they are proud to work at the school. They and governors share your ambition to provide the best possible education for pupils. Your clear vision has steered the work of other leaders. In particular, your work to guide subject leaders has secured strong foundations in curriculum design on which you can build.

You have ensured that subject leaders have benefited from high-quality training to develop their subject knowledge and curriculum expertise. Before the first national lockdown in spring 2020, most subject leaders had designed and rolled out new curriculums. These curriculums set out clearly what pupils should know and be able to do. Due to the disruption caused by COVID-19, in a small number of subjects, curriculum plans have only been put into practice by teachers more recently. In these subjects, leaders are still working to provide support for teachers to allow them to design learning that builds on what pupils know already.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to focus on pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation. Teachers now deliver these aspects of the writing curriculum more systematically than they did previously. Pupils demonstrate their growing knowledge of spelling, grammar and punctuation when writing independently. The subject leader of mathematics has also strengthened the curriculum so that pupils learn and practise their number facts in a logical order.

Throughout the pandemic, you and the staff continued to prioritise the teaching of early reading. The early reading and phonics curriculum allows pupils to practise sounds regularly. Pupils use their phonics knowledge to read books that are chosen carefully for them. Teachers ensure that those pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who are at risk of falling behind with their reading receive extra help from staff. Pupils across the school, including children in the early years, enjoy reading.

Leaders have transformed the early years curriculum and the environment in which children learn. The curriculum in the early years is designed carefully so that new learning builds on what children know already. Leaders and teachers in the early years now use assessment more effectively to inform teaching.

Following a review of governance in 2019, members of the governing body reviewed the way that they work and ensured they could benefit from appropriate training. Governors have a detailed knowledge of the improvements that leaders

have made since the last inspection. However, they are less well equipped to offer informed challenge to leaders about their work to improve the curriculum.

Additional support

You acknowledge how effective support from the local authority has been in helping subject leaders to improve their curriculum plans. The local authority has now reduced its level of support to the school. This reflects the confidence of the local authority in you and other leaders' ability to continue the journey of improvement.

More recently, subject leaders have valued the opportunity to work with other leaders at your partner school. As a result, subject leaders have grown in confidence and curriculum expertise.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the head of school, subject leaders, pupils, two representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I examined a variety of documentation, including leaders' improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings, subject curriculum plans and documents relating to safeguarding. I reviewed 48 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 32 responses to Ofsted's free-text facility. I also reviewed the 20 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Alongside curriculum leaders, I examined a range of pupils' work. I also carried out a series of visits to classrooms and observed a small number of pupils reading to a trusted adult.

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

Yours sincerely

Garry White
Her Majesty's Inspector