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Dear Mrs Webb

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wirksworth Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 8 June 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.

The school should take further action to:

- urgently improve curriculum plans so that subject knowledge is clearly identified and sequenced in all subjects
- ensure that support for those pupils who are furthest behind with reading is more consistent.

Context

Since the previous inspection, several staff have left the school. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed. There is a new chair of the governing body. A number of governors are new to the role.

Main findings

Leaders are improving the school's curriculum. Some subject leaders use research to inform their plans. In some subjects, leaders identify the important knowledge that they want pupils to learn. For example, in history, leaders set out key vocabulary such as empire, invasion and civilisation when pupils learn about the Ancient Greeks. Plans make clear what pupils need to know and remember. This includes that Ancient Greece was divided into small city-states such as Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Corinth and Delphi.

New curriculum plans are helping pupils to know more and remember more. For example, pupils know about pointillism in art. They can explain how to use a paintbrush to apply colour and paint an image. However, when discussing previous work in art, pupils remember painting water lilies but none of the underlying knowledge of Monet or Impressionism. The knowledge that teachers expect pupils to learn is not set out clearly enough in all subjects. Curriculum plans in geography, design technology and religious education, for example, are still at the very early stages of development.

Leaders' improvement plans focus on the well-being of pupils and staff and training for staff and the governing body. The plans do not set out clearly enough how leaders will improve the curriculum. For example, they do not make clear that identifying the subject knowledge which pupils are to learn is a priority for the school.

Actions to improve reading are not precise enough. Support for pupils who are furthest behind in reading is not consistently effective. Pupils who need support with reading are given extra sessions with trained staff. However, leaders do not routinely check the quality of this support. Books are sometimes too hard for older readers.

Teachers adapt the curriculum to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who access the same lesson content as others.

Governors have acted quickly to improve governance. They seek support from national leaders of governance and understand their responsibilities. Governors hold leaders to account but do not have a sharp enough understanding of the school's work to develop the curriculum.

Parents and carers are generally supportive of the school. They acknowledge the work of the staff during lockdown and recognise that it is an improving school.

Additional support

Representatives of the local authority provide support and challenge to help leaders address weaker areas of the curriculum. The local authority checks the impact of leaders' actions and provides training for governors.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior and curriculum leaders, pupils, staff, governors and representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I observed pupils reading to staff. I reviewed responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 10 free-text responses, and 13 staff questionnaires. I reviewed the school's plans for improvement and minutes of governing body meetings. I scrutinised the single central record of pre-employment checks.

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

Yours sincerely

Damien Turrell
Her Majesty's Inspector