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Alyson Walsh
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Dear Mrs Walsh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Radcliffe Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 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 curriculum plans for all subjects are well sequenced and identify the important knowledge that pupils need to learn and by when
- continue to improve subject leaders' knowledge and skills, so they can check how well the revised curriculum enables pupils to build their knowledge over time

- implement a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics and ensure that staff have the training that they need to ensure that pupils become confident and fluent readers
- ensure that governors and trustees provide appropriate challenge and support around your work to improve the curriculum.

Context

Since the monitoring inspection on 17 January 2020, you have made changes to the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team. The deputy headteacher is now responsible for special educational needs and/or disabilities and is the designated safeguarding lead. The chair of governors and another governor have left the governing body. A new chair of governors is in post and three additional governors have joined the governing body.

Main findings

Since the school's last inspection in March 2019, you have focused on improving many aspects of the school's work. For example, you have successfully improved pupils' behaviour and the mathematics curriculum. Staff are positive about the changes in the school. Although there have been improvements in many areas of the school, weaknesses in the early reading curriculum continue to hamper pupils from making the most of the improving curriculum.

At the start of the pandemic, you were in the process of reviewing the school's curriculum. This is still ongoing because your plans have been delayed due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. You have prioritised the mathematics curriculum from Nursery to Year 6. New curriculum plans identify the content that you want pupils to know and by when. Staff have received appropriate training that is helping them to deliver the new plans more effectively. Systems for checking what is being taught mean that you and other leaders have a better understanding of what pupils know and remember.

In contrast, the curriculums in subjects such as science, history, geography, and art and design are at an early stage of development. Subject leaders are benefiting from the support that they are receiving to develop the curriculum plans. They have carefully researched what pupils need to know and remember in these subjects. Staff and pupils have also been involved in this process to make sure that the learning programmes are relevant and meaningful. However, these plans do not currently contain enough detail about what pupils should be learning and when they should cover this content.

The improvements noted in many subjects are not replicated in the early reading curriculum. You and other leaders have not prioritised teaching pupils to read. The approach to phonics teaching is muddled because staff are able to pick and choose

from different phonics programmes. Too many staff lack the skills that they need to teach early reading well. Reading books do not match the sounds that pupils already know. This hinders their progress not only in reading, but across all of the subjects that they study.

Your work to improve pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is paying dividends. Pupils and staff who spoke with me said that pupils' behaviour has improved significantly. Pupils were keen to say that bullying and fighting did not happen at their school anymore.

Evidence from minutes of governing body meetings shows that they now ask you more searching questions. However, while governors ask questions about many aspects of school, they do not question in enough depth about the effectiveness of your actions to improve the quality of education in all subjects. They have not paid enough attention to your work to ensure that pupils become confident and fluent readers. As a result, they do not have an accurate enough view of your work to improve the curriculum.

Additional support

You and the staff appreciate the advice and support that you have received from the local authority, education consultants and the local hubs for English and mathematics. You and the staff are using this support well to improve leadership at all levels and to make the necessary changes to the curriculum. You are beginning to focus the support from the trust and external partners on the reading curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, staff, and representatives of those responsible for governance and trustees to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I met with a group of pupils to ask them about their work and their experiences of school life. I visited phonics and reading lessons, accompanied by the phonics leader, and observed pupils reading with teachers and support staff.

I examined a variety of documentation, including the school improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings and curriculum plans.

I took account of the 56 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 17 responses to the online staff survey.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Bury College Education Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bury. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Barlow
Her Majesty's Inspector