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Shelley Reeves-Walters
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Reeves-Walters

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Far Forest Lea Memorial CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 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:

- ensure that staff have the required subject knowledge to teach the curriculum in the foundation subjects effectively.

Context

There have been several staffing changes since the previous inspection in May 2019. You were appointed as executive headteacher in September 2019. You restructured subject leadership and appointed a new leader for the early years foundation stage.

The school became an associate member of the Severn Academies Educational Trust (SAET) in September 2019.

Leaders feel that the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed the progress of some of their improvement plans. They say that it has been difficult to see and measure the impact of some of the plans due to the repeated lockdowns. However, plans are beginning to get back on track.

Main findings

Since your appointment as executive headteacher, you have galvanised the staff. You have ensured that staffing has remained stable, after a period of instability. You have established a clear vision that is shared by all staff. All staff say they are proud to work at the school. All parental comments received echoed this view. One parent's comment summed up the views of many, 'The school has come on leaps and bounds since the last Ofsted inspection, under new senior management. I am very happy with the education my child receives.'

Senior leaders have rightly focused on developing the curriculum. You have put in place a brand-new curriculum in the foundation subjects. Plans map out the important knowledge you want the pupils to know and remember. Teachers follow these plans well. However, some teachers do not have the subject knowledge to teach these plans well enough. Pupils' ability to use what they know and understand in different contexts is not secure. This is because staff have not identified the knowledge that is common to different subjects. This means pupils' knowledge is also not as secure as it could be.

Many curriculum leaders are new to their role. However, they have wasted no time in developing the subjects for which they have responsibility. They have received effective support from the school's improvement adviser and have a clear vision for their subject. Curriculum leaders are checking that teachers are delivering the curriculum effectively. Leaders plan to review the curriculum and make changes where necessary. However, it is too early to see the effect of this work on pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Staff are beginning to find gaps in pupils' knowledge. The systems in place to identify gaps are effective in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers systematically check what pupils can and cannot do. They then adapt learning to ensure that gaps are addressed. This approach is not as effective in the foundation

subjects. Teachers respond to gaps when they arise rather than making systematic checks on what pupils remember.

Leaders have continued to prioritise the teaching of phonics and reading both in school and during lockdowns. Leaders have ensured that reading is at the heart of the curriculum. Phonics has also been prioritised. Staff in the early years and key stage 1 are well trained to teach phonics. They can identify gaps in learning and address those gaps effectively. Leaders are aware that not all staff are skilled enough to support pupils with their phonics as they move into key stage 2. Leaders have plans in place to address this.

Teachers' expectations of all pupils are higher than they were at the time of the last inspection. All pupils are beginning to be challenged effectively. No pupil is at a disadvantage. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are given the support they need to be successful.

Governors are clear about their role. They hold leaders to account for pupils' progress and school improvement. They ask the right questions of leaders. They have worked decisively to support the school since the last inspection, including appointing the current headteacher. During the pandemic, they have kept their focus on school improvement. They also supported staff's and pupils' well-being. Governors ensure that they have a full understanding of the school's strengths and areas of development by checking information they receive from the school's support adviser and the local authority progress meetings.

The school's improvement plan focuses on the priorities identified at the last inspection. It has highlighted additional targets, based on the school's current position. The targets are well planned and clear. Timings given support leaders to maintain a sense of urgency to improvement plans.

Additional support

The executive headteacher works across another local school in SAET. Subject leaders from both schools work together to share effective practice. They have supported each other in making improvements to their curriculum plans.

The school's improvement adviser has worked with subject leaders to understand the role. They have received coaching and have begun to receive support in checking the impact of their actions. The local authority has also supported the school with COVID-19 risk assessments. School leaders have valued this support.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the leaders for reading and art and three members of the governing

body. I also spoke with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I examined the school's single central register of background checks on adults working in the school. I reviewed the school's improvement plan and minutes of governors' meetings. I scrutinised curriculum plans alongside pupils' workbooks. I met with a group of six pupils. I considered the 27 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and 13 free-text responses.

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

Yours sincerely

Eve Morris
Her Majesty's Inspector