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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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28 June 2021

Mark McCadden
Headteacher
Birdham CE Primary School
Crooked Lane
Birdham
Chichester
West Sussex
PO20 7HB

Dear Mr McCadden

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birdham CE 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 the improvement plan contains the most important actions that will help the school improve

- improve subject leaders' monitoring to check how well pupils are learning the curriculum
- develop assessment in the wider curriculum to check pupils' understanding and inform teaching.

Context

Three governors have joined since the inspection in March 2019. The special educational needs coordinator and chair of the governing body started in their roles in September 2020.

Main findings

Changes following the previous inspection were not always swift enough and the pandemic interrupted your plans. However, since March 2021, you and your staff have accelerated the pace of improvement. Leaders and governors have worked together with a renewed sense of urgency to improve the school. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning.

You have made sure that plans are now in place for almost all subjects. Where they are well developed, for example in mathematics, plans contain carefully sequenced knowledge that builds on what pupils have learned before. In a few subjects, leaders are at an earlier stage of identifying and ordering the most important knowledge that pupils need. You have accurately identified that assessment beyond English and mathematics is an area to be developed.

Since the inspection in March 2019, you have worked to develop subject leadership. You have supported staff to look at books, talk to pupils and visit lessons to check pupils' learning. Recently, some subject leaders have begun reviewing how well pupils learn in different subjects. There is more work to do.

You have prioritised improving reading. Older pupils enjoy the increased range of reading opportunities. The youngest pupils have phonics sessions daily. Weaker readers benefit from additional sessions in small groups. This is helping pupils who fell behind in the spring term to catch up quickly. You have recently made sure that classrooms are equipped with more books for younger readers that match the sounds they are learning.

You and your team have identified the right priorities in the school improvement plan, but the planned actions are not precise enough. It is not always clear what the most important steps to take are for Birdham to become a good school.

Most parents are supportive of the school. They valued the communication and support during the period when schools were closed to most pupils. Some parents would welcome further information about what their child will learn during the year.

Governors are increasingly effective. They visit the school and use reports from other professionals to assure themselves that what leaders tell them is accurate. Governors are improving their own understanding of the curriculum so that they can further challenge leaders to improve the school.

Additional support

The local authority has helped leaders, including governors, review progress towards Birdham becoming a good school. Local authority advisers have also supported some subject leaders to monitor their subjects. The diocese has supported the headteacher to balance staff well-being and school improvement work.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance, including the chair of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and a representative from the diocese of Chichester to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with a group of pupils.

I evaluated the school's improvement plan, visited lessons with the headteacher, listened to pupils read and scrutinised internal and external monitoring reports. I also looked at 60 responses, including 38 free-text comments, to Ofsted's parent questionnaire, Parent View. I also looked at 12 staff survey responses.

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

Yours sincerely

Laurie Anderson
Her Majesty's Inspector