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Dear Mrs Hoyle

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Concord Junior 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 taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that there are not long periods of time when some subjects are not taught and make sure that pupils have opportunities to revisit their learning so that they remember more
- allocate and develop subject leader roles so that every subject is carefully monitored and that staff have support to further improve the quality of education.

Context

During periods of partial closure due to COVID-19, most of the school's usual curriculum was covered. However, the school found it difficult to deliver the practical elements of some subjects. They decided to save some of this practical work until the school fully re-opened to all pupils. This means that some parts of the curriculum are being delivered in a different order than was originally planned.

COVID-19 has also impacted on school improvement. Leaders were able to continue with their plans, but their rate of progress slowed. This means that they have not completed all the actions that they intended to by this point in the year.

One teacher has joined the school from the partner infant school since the last section 5 inspection in June 2019.

Main findings

You have an ambitious vision that has been communicated well to the whole staff team. This has created a culture of high expectation. Plans for improvement are detailed and clear. Actions have been taken in a timely manner.

Pupils are well behaved in lessons and show positive attitudes to learning. The use of exclusion has dramatically reduced and is now only used in exceptional circumstances.

Leaders have introduced several changes which they believe have improved the quality of education since the last section 5 inspection. A new curriculum has been in place since September 2020. They initially based this on a published scheme which they previously used. Leaders have amended it to make it more tailored for this school. English and mathematics are taught as discrete subjects. Other subjects are mainly taught through topics. Plans are well sequenced and show the knowledge, skills, key concepts and vocabulary pupils will cover in each subject or topic. Prior learning is shown on each plan so that teachers can check that pupils have retained learning from previous year groups. Consideration is also given to making sure that pupils are ready for the challenges of the next year group.

During the inspection, I checked the implementation and impact of curriculum plans by looking at science and history. Pupils have covered the work shown in plans. However, speaking to pupils about their learning showed that most pupils struggle to remember the knowledge in any detail. This was more apparent in science than history. The way the curriculum is organised means that sometimes there are periods of several weeks when a subject is not taught. This is not helping pupils to remember their learning. Leaders need to find ways to make sure that learning is revisited so that pupils remember more.

Training has ensured that staff have the subject knowledge they need to teach this curriculum. However, leaders are keen to continue to help teachers to deepen their knowledge so that they are better placed to help pupils to make links between areas of learning.

At the time of the inspection, there were very few subject leaders. However, all teachers have been given training on the key elements of the role. Leaders now need to allocate subjects to teachers and support them to lead learning in these subjects and to monitor the quality of education.

Work has been done to improve support for pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read. All pupils are assessed when they join the school to check for any gaps in their phonics knowledge. These gaps are addressed in small group and individual catch up sessions. The books pupils use to practise their reading in school match their phonics knowledge. Care has been taken in choosing books to make sure that the content is age appropriate and appeals to junior age pupils.

Leaders have worked to improve their relationships with parents. The school has an effective method of communicating with parents. This is a two-way system that is used frequently. Parents are kept informed about the content of the topics their children are studying and are given ideas about how to extend learning at home.

A new approach to supporting pupils' social and emotional well-being is being used. All staff have had training. Leaders acknowledge that this is in the early stage of development. Nevertheless, it is already having an impact on some pupils who are much better at self-regulating their behaviour.

Leaders are keen to help pupils to develop their speaking skills. They are taking part in a trust wide project called 'Voice Brigantia'. Common discussion guidelines have been developed and pupils now have more opportunities to debate and discuss their learning.

Leaders carefully monitor attendance. They reward pupils in many ways for good attendance and work with parents to stress the importance of attending school every day. Although attendance has improved, it is not as good as it needs to be. Leaders need to continue to work with pupils and parents to find ways to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence.

The trust executive and trustees know the school well. This is because of the wealth of information that they collect from school leaders. They know what is done well and what needs to improve. They hold leaders to account for their actions and provide them with effective support.

Additional support

The trust supports and challenges school leaders by monitoring their plans and checking the impact of their actions. It has also brokered reviews and support from external consultants on various areas including special educational needs and/or disabilities, safeguarding and reading. This work has helped school leaders to make changes which are having a positive impact, especially on the quality of education pupils receive.

The local authority has supported leaders to develop their curriculum. Leaders say that this input has been really valuable.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the executive principal, the head of school, other senior leaders, pupils, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, director of education and chief operating officer and trustees to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited every class, looked at work with pupils and leaders and observed a reading catch up session. I looked at the school's self-evaluation, the academy development plan and curriculum plans. I also considered 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including one free-text response, and 15 responses to the staff questionnaire.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector