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Sarah Barnes
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Dear Mrs Barnes

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to English Martyrs Catholic Primary School, A Voluntary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 25 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:

- ensure that the phonics and reading curriculum is embedded and delivered more consistently
- improve the quality of curriculum planning and sequencing, from the early years to Year 6
- provide curriculum training to all staff, including teaching assistants, so that they benefit from the knowledge and expertise of those staff who have already been trained.

Context

There have been significant staffing changes and absences since the previous inspection. The pace of improvement has been disrupted by these staffing changes and by COVID-19.

In the absence of key staff, the trust has acted quickly to provide stability and leadership expertise. An interim deputy headteacher joined the school in November 2020. An interim headteacher took up post in April 2021.

A rapid improvement group (RIG) regularly challenges and monitors the school. The RIG has recruited new governors. This is to enable a transition to a local governing body.

Main findings

Despite the challenges in staffing, the trust has maintained a focus on school improvement. The areas for improvement raised at the previous inspection are being addressed. The school improvement plan identifies the right priorities. However, the plan would benefit from precise timescales and clear allocation of responsibilities. COVID-19 came very soon after the previous inspection and this has interrupted progress.

Key staff have received important training in reading, mathematics and other subjects, such as history and modern foreign languages. The impact of that training is beginning to show in teachers' subject knowledge. Staff believe that the school is improving, and they demonstrate a strong sense of purpose and teamwork. The pupils whom I spoke with enjoy their lessons and are appreciative of the care and support of the teachers.

The development of reading is a key priority. Your reading leader is working with a local English Hub to improve phonics teaching. There has been a major investment in additional books and resources. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the books that they are reading. Teachers are developing stronger links with parents to further encourage pupils to read at home. However, COVID-19 delayed some staff training

in early reading and phonics. There remain some inconsistencies in the implementation of the phonics programme. You are aware that further training is needed to achieve greater consistency in the teaching of phonics.

Improvements to the early years environment began at the time of the previous inspection, in January 2020. These improvements have been further developed. For example, better resources have been provided for children. Greater outdoor space has been created. Teachers are using the new resources well to support the development of reading and numeracy skills.

In mathematics, the lead teacher has used expertise from a centre of excellence. They have also developed resources and brought in a commercial scheme. The mathematics curriculum has strengthened. Lessons begin by checking that pupils have the required knowledge from the previous lesson. This means that pupils have the understanding needed to carry out more challenging mathematical procedures. Further training is required to share expertise more widely across the staff.

You are taking action to improve the quality of the wider curriculum. Reading and mathematics have been your priorities. The focus on other subjects has been reduced due to COVID-19 and the challenges you have faced in staffing. However, you are encouraging staff to work with other schools to refine curriculum plans. Along with support from the local authority, teachers value these networks.

Teachers think carefully about essential knowledge and the order in which to teach it. In history, for example, there is now a carefully sequenced curriculum. This helps pupils to learn important concepts such as empire and invasion. Plans are more advanced in some subjects than in others. Currently, curriculum planning in all subjects does not consider carefully enough the early years as the starting point.

You have made improvements to the procedures for identifying, helping and managing pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. I saw specific examples of the positive impact of this work. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has ensured that pupils in need of additional support receive it, for example speech and language therapy. One parent commented, 'My son has special educational needs and I feel the school really helps him.'

The trust has provided additional staffing and resources. It has supported the appointment of a learning mentor. It has also supported the purchase of new reading books and phonics resources. You have recognised that staff will need further training to make the most of these additional resources.

Additional support

Your staff are working with external partners to develop the curriculum. Teachers have improved the curriculum for reading and mathematics through links with English and mathematics Hubs. Teachers have developed their subject knowledge

through networks in the diocese and from within the trust. Additional, independent support and scrutiny comes from the local authority. This range of support is bringing about improvement.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher. I also met the SENCo and a number of subject leaders. We discussed the actions taken to improve the school since the last inspection. I undertook lesson visits in English and mathematics. I met a group of pupils to discuss behaviour and learning. I held discussions with members of the trust, including the chief executive officer. I looked at curriculum plans, some pupils' work and the school improvement plan.

I considered 27 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and 21 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the RIG, the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Bishop Konstant Catholic Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Carl Sugden
Ofsted Inspector