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Daniel Sumner
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sumner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Calow CofE VC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 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 three 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.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been some changes to leadership responsibilities due to staff absence. The headteacher is currently responsible for leading several subjects in addition to his substantive role. Leaders have been given

time to work together to pass on their responsibilities. There is a new chair of governors and five new members of the governing body have been appointed since the previous inspection.

Pupils' attendance has returned to normal levels following the wider reopening of the school in March 2021. Most pupils have settled back well to familiar routines; however, there is a small proportion of pupils who have not. Sometimes, their behaviour falls below the standard that leaders expect. Leaders are working with these pupils so that all pupils' learning is not interrupted.

Main findings

Leaders have acted with urgency to improve the teaching of phonics since the previous inspection. They have higher expectations that all pupils will learn to read fluently, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders ensure that learning to read gets off to a swift start from when children start in the nursery. Leaders have made sure that there is a more consistent approach to the teaching of early reading through the use of a newly introduced phonics scheme. Staff model pure sounds and pupils listen carefully. Pupils use this knowledge to read and spell words correctly. Teachers spot when pupils need more practice to blend sounds fluently. Teachers make sure that pupils get the help that they need to catch up quickly, including those who have gaps in their learning due to the lockdown.

Leaders have made sure that reading books match the sounds that pupils know. Pupils use these books to practise blending the sounds that they are learning. Teachers check precisely the sounds that pupils know. They use this information to support pupils' next steps in learning to read. Leaders are tenacious in identifying what needs to be done next to improve the teaching of reading. They plan to further develop staff phonics expertise. They know that they need to record the reading curriculum so that it clearly identifies exactly what pupils need to know and remember term-by-term.

Leaders are developing a mathematics curriculum that is clearly sequenced, but this work is not yet complete. They are providing staff with training to improve their knowledge of how to teach mathematics. Teachers identify gaps in pupils' knowledge that are the result of the lockdown. They plan activities so that pupils become more fluent mathematicians. Pupils practise their mathematics knowledge and learning at the start of every school day. They like it when they remember important number facts quickly and show how they can correct their mistakes. However, some pupils cannot recall their learning well enough. They cannot always explain what they learned before and how it helps them now.

Leaders have begun to develop the curriculum in other subjects, such as history and geography. They are using appropriate resources to help them do this. Subject leaders have received much of their professional development online due to the

pandemic. They have begun to identify and sequence the key knowledge that they want pupils to learn from early years to the end of Year 6. Leaders are planning more training so that all staff understand precisely what pupils have learned before and what they need to learn next.

Leaders are ambitious that every pupil, including those with SEND, can know more and remember more over time. As one leader remarked: 'We're not lowering our expectations but making sure that we are precise about what we want everyone to learn. This helps all our children.' Identifying these small steps of knowledge is beginning to make a difference for all pupils.

Despite the pandemic, governors have continued to work with the local authority to check that leaders' actions are improving the school. Governors and leaders know what the school does well. They also know what needs to improve. Their self-evaluation is accurate. The pandemic has hindered some of the pace of change. During lockdown, staff had to adapt some of their teaching for remote learning. Leaders had to put some improvement plans on hold. However, now that the school has fully reopened, much of the planned improvement work has begun again apace.

Additional support

Leaders have received support from the East Midlands West Maths Hub. This has supported teachers to develop their subject knowledge. It has also helped leaders understand what they still need to do to improve the mathematics curriculum.

Local authority advisers have helped leaders to plan actions to improve the school's provision. They have begun to check that these actions are making a difference. More support is planned to make sure that the curriculum is ambitious and well sequenced in all subjects so that pupils build on what they have learned previously.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, the coordinator for pupils with SEND and some subject leaders. I met with the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I reviewed the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plan and a range of other documents. I spoke with groups of pupils and considered their work. I visited lessons with leaders and listened to pupils reading to members of staff. I considered the 16 responses to the staff survey and the 32 parental responses on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as the 22 free-text comments.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Derby, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Hazel Henson
Her Majesty's Inspector