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Dear Mrs Cook

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Richard's VC Academy

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 leaders' curriculum plans, in all subjects, provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to revisit prior learning
- ensure that assessments capture the extent to which pupils have learned the taught curriculum.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. Leaders have restructured the leadership of the school and two assistant headteachers have recently taken up their posts.

Leaders' usual approach to sharing pupils' work with parents and carers through 'showcase' events has been halted due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Main findings

Leaders have high expectations for all pupils. Leaders are clear that they want pupils to be aspirational and enjoy memorable learning experiences. Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, leaders have acted swiftly to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection.

Leaders have considered the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) when they have designed the curriculum. Subjects such as history and geography now provide more opportunities to revisit prior learning. Leaders see this as fundamental to helping pupils to remember more. Curriculum plans show what leaders intend pupils will learn and be able to do. In history and geography, the newly introduced initiative, 'map it and mark it' is providing pupils with an opportunity to recap their learning more frequently. It is helping pupils to develop a stronger sense of chronology and recall key facts.

Despite the curriculum being well sequenced and progressive, subjects such as science do not yet provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to recap on their learning. However, leaders are reviewing their curriculum. They are reflecting on the impact of their curriculum over the last year and making the necessary changes in readiness for September 2021.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has reviewed the support that is provided to pupils with SEND. Each pupil on the SEND register has a 'pupil passport' which contains targets to address gaps in their knowledge. These are reviewed regularly. The introduction of the pupil passport is bringing a sharper focus to how pupils with SEND are supported in the classroom.

Subject leaders benefit from a wide range of support provided by school and trust leaders. This has included help with writing curriculum plans, subject leader training and opportunities to share good practice. This package of support gives subject leaders the skills and knowledge they need to develop their subject. As a result, subject leaders support their colleagues to embed the curriculum. Leaders at all levels describe a tangible sense of change.

Subject leaders do not work in isolation. Leaders have created teams of staff from across the school to work alongside subject leaders to develop their plans. This

ensures that curriculum plans consider the needs of pupils at every stage of their education. As a result, the curriculum is progressive from the early years to Year 6.

Leaders are prioritising the development of pupils' language and vocabulary across the curriculum. Teachers provide pupils with extra resources such as 'knowledge mats' to help them use subject-specific vocabulary with accuracy. One pupil in the early years was able to define the meaning of the word 'gloopy' from a text that they had been reading together in class. However, pupils' grasp of subject-specific vocabulary varies. When speaking to a group of Year 6 pupils, their use of vocabulary was much stronger in history than geography.

Leaders' approach to assessment is very recent. Trust-wide key performance indicators have been introduced as a way of assessing the most important knowledge and skills that leaders want pupils to remember. The impact of this is not clear. The revisions that leaders are making to their curriculum content will need to be reflected in their assessment criteria. This will support leaders and teachers in gathering a comprehensive picture of what pupils can do.

Leaders have made positive changes to the early years learning environment. Children now learn in a space that is stimulating and engaging. Leaders and teachers use assessment to identify children that need extra help. In the mathematics area, for example, an adult was supporting a child to add numbers using counters. Leaders have trained adults in the early years so that they have the knowledge to question and support children while they are learning. Activities hold children's attention. The questions adults ask help children to develop and deepen their knowledge and understanding.

Reading remains a high priority. Leaders have established a lending library to encourage more reading at home. The implementation of this has been paused due to COVID-19. Leaders ensure that all staff have the necessary skills and knowledge to support pupils with phonics. Leaders use their checks on pupils' phonics knowledge to provide teaching to meet their needs. As a result, books are matched to the sounds pupils know.

Pupils read with enthusiasm. Older pupils, who remain at the early stage of learning to read, receive additional help through phonics lessons and reading interventions. The reading lead is supporting the work of the early years team to moderate and improve the teaching of phonics to the youngest children. This means that pupils are getting off to a stronger start in reception.

Additional support

The trust works closely with leaders to support school improvement plans. The trust has strong processes in place to monitor the actions leaders are taking. It has carried out recent reviews of SEND and early years. Information from the reviews is

helping leaders to decide on their school improvement priorities. Leaders acknowledge the benefits of working with the trust in this way.

The trust provides opportunities for leaders to share good practice. Regular meetings are held with leaders to challenge and support them.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with the headteacher, both assistant headteachers and the trust director for school improvement. I met with the reading and phonics leaders and I listened to pupils read to an adult. I checked the single central register with the school office manager.

I met with subject leaders in history, geography and science. We discussed their curriculum plans and the actions they have taken to improve their subjects. I met with one representative of the board of directors. I also held a telephone conversation with the diocese school's commissioner. I met with three representatives of the board of trustees. I spoke to a group of Year 6 pupils about their learning and gathered their views on the school. I met with the SENCo and I reviewed some of the plans that are in place for pupils with SEND. I visited the early years classroom and spoke with the early years leader to discuss the actions that leaders have taken to improve the learning environment.

I reviewed 24 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 19 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including 17 free-text responses.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Middlesbrough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kingston Upon Hull City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector