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7 July 2021

Daniel Hartley
Danesfield Church of England Voluntary Controlled Community Middle School
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Dear Mr Hartley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Danesfield Church of England Voluntary Controlled Community Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 22 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 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school 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:

- adapt curriculum plans so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported effectively to learn and remember key knowledge

- make sure that pupils with SEND are fully supported to develop their social skills so that their needs are met in full.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, new chairs have been appointed to the board of trustees and to the local governing body. The number of pupils on roll is set to rise in September 2021, when a larger than usual cohort will join the school as Year 5. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, transition activities for pupils moving up to secondary schools at the end of Year 8 are more limited than usual.

Main findings

A key challenge for the school over time has been to create the leadership capacity necessary to monitor the impact of the curriculum. You have designed a robust system and set aside time for leaders to make their checks. There has been a change of mindset in the school. Leaders now test out whether pupils can remember what they have learned through the curriculum.

You have done much to build positive relationships with parents. They describe staff who are upbeat and tirelessly helpful. You played an important part in supporting vulnerable families through the period of national restrictions. Now that pupils have returned to school you have begun to reinstate extra-curricular activities. You have secured funding for an outdoor project which will further support vulnerable pupils over the summer break.

As a result of leader's actions, pupils read more often. Most days, pupils read in their English lessons or at home. Pupils helpfully keep a record of what they have read in a reading diary. They do not yet enjoy their reading as much as they could, but they are on the way to developing secure reading habits that will stand them in good stead into adulthood.

Pupils who do not yet read accurately and fluently have extra support with specialist staff. This helps them to develop their knowledge of phonics. Leaders have made sure this approach remains motivating for older pupils through the use of age-appropriate texts. Teachers also make checks on pupils' reading comprehension and handwriting. They provide helpful support for pupils who need to improve in these areas.

In recent weeks, subject leaders have gained greater clarity in their thinking about the curriculum. In English, mathematics and science, leaders have improved their curriculum plans. These make clear the most important knowledge for pupils to gain. Leaders make intelligent use of assessment to spot where pupils have not learned what was intended. When this happens, leaders rethink what pupils need to

do next. Leaders also adapt their teaching plans for the following year, for example by giving more time to a concept that pupils have found difficult.

Teachers have received useful training on how they can help pupils to remember the most important curriculum content. They are beginning to use new approaches. Each lesson begins with a 'settling task' in which pupils call to mind something learned previously. These approaches have not yet had time to have the desired impact on pupils' memory. For example, pupils cannot currently recall key knowledge of the poetic form, or of French verbs, even though they have learned these things before.

Staff use a range of approaches to make sure that pupils with SEND access the curriculum. For example, in mathematics, pupils with SEND are sometimes introduced to new learning before the rest of the class. This helps them to keep up. There is still work to do to build these approaches into curriculum plans so that pupils with SEND have the best chance to learn and remember the most important curriculum content.

Some of the supportive measures that are planned for pupils with SEND have not yet been reinstated following the full return to school. As a result, pupils are not developing the social skills they need to work alongside others successfully.

Additional support

Trust leaders have acted quickly to make sure that school leaders have the support they need to improve the curriculum and maximise its impact on pupils' learning. Curriculum leaders have received useful support from a consultant to develop their curriculum plans. They also benefit from trust-wide subject networks through which they can link with their counterparts in other schools. The trust has brokered training for teachers provided by a different multi-academy trust. Further, the trust has ensured that the headteacher has valuable external support when evaluating the impact of work to improve the curriculum so far.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with the headteacher and the senior leadership team, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke with the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust on the telephone and held a meeting onsite with representatives from the board of trustees and the local governing body.

I met with trust staff in order to scrutinise the single central record of adults working with the school and held a discussion with the designated safeguarding lead.

In addition, I met with a group of curriculum leaders and visited lessons. I met with a group of pupils to discuss their experiences of the curriculum. I reviewed a range of documents, including the school development plan.

I considered 62 responses to the Ofsted online survey Parent View, including 15 free-text responses, and 25 responses to the staff questionnaire.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the West Somerset Academies Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Lydia Pride
Her Majesty's Inspector