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Lisa Marshall
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Dear Mrs Marshall

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St Monica Primary School

Following my visit with Chris Ellison, Her Majesty's Inspector, Lea Hannam, Ofsted Inspector (OI) and Bruce Waelend (OI), to your school on 15 and 16 June 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in October 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Southampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Hanna Miller
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 June 2021

Context

Since the school's section 5 inspection in October 2019, the leadership of the school has changed. In September 2020, the local authority commissioned the Inspire Leadership Partnership (ILP) to lead and manage the school as part of a service level agreement. A new executive headteacher from the ILP has been in post since September 2020 and is contracted to work at the school for two and a half days each week. An interim executive board (IEB) has been in place since October 2020; the chair of the IEB has changed very recently. In April 2021, there was a change in the leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff turnover at the school continues to be high and the number of pupils on roll has declined since the previous section 5 inspection.

During the partial closure of schools in England due to COVID-19 restrictions between January and March 2021, just under a third of pupils were being educated on site. Pupils learning from home were accessing the curriculum through paper-based resources and an online platform. Since the return of all pupils to school, leaders have experienced some long-term staff absences.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

From the time of the previous section 5 inspection in October 2019, improvements have been hindered by staffing changes and the COVID-19 pandemic. Since September 2020, leaders, supported by the ILP, have made sufficient progress in improving the teaching of reading and mathematics and the behaviour of pupils. There have also been some recent improvements in the provision for pupils with SEND. However, leaders have been too slow to ensure that pupils are all receiving an ambitious curriculum.

Leaders have focused on improving the quality of planning and teaching early reading and making improvements to the curriculum in mathematics. The phonics and mathematics curriculum plans are carefully sequenced. These plans are implemented consistently in most classes and help pupils to make progress. As a result, the majority of pupils are increasingly well supported to develop more complex knowledge and skills, through clear and consistent routines in these subjects.

Leaders have taken sufficient steps towards improving the teaching of early reading. They have made sure that there is a clear structure and sequence for the teaching of phonics. This begins as soon as pupils start in early years and continues throughout key stage 1. When pupils require further support learning to read, it is available in key stage 2. Teachers are becoming more confident at quickly

identifying pupils who need additional practice. Where pupils find it difficult to recognise sounds and blend with confidence and accuracy, they are provided with additional phonics teaching to complement their daily lessons. All staff have been trained in the school's approach to teaching phonics and these consistent reading routines, as well as pupils' enjoyment of reading, were observed during the inspection. When pupils are at an early stage of learning to read, they are given decodable books that match the sounds they have been taught. Many children speak with enthusiasm about books they have read and have had read to them. Pupils now talk about their favourite authors and reading preferences. However, there is not yet a consistent approach to using well-chosen texts to enrich pupils' knowledge and understanding in other areas of the curriculum.

Current leaders from the ILP have been ambitious in driving further improvements to the teaching of mathematics. The foundations for successful learning in mathematics are laid securely in the early years, where children show and explain their thinking clearly, using developmentally appropriate language. Teachers now use a range of representations and visualisations that help pupils to learn in mathematics. This approach helps pupils to build new learning on what has been previously taught and remembered. Careful planning enables pupils who have not understood something to revisit their previous step before moving on.

Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum provides the breadth required by the national curriculum. Some pupils have not been taught some subjects, such as computing or a modern foreign language, this year. Other subjects, including music, art and technology, have been taught at such irregular intervals that pupils have not remembered what they were taught previously. In history and geography, there is a lack of connectedness between current and previous learning. Leaders have not ensured that planning and teaching are based on what pupils know and can do. For example, in history, when learning about the Anglo-Saxons, pupils demonstrate significant gaps in their knowledge of invasions, which affects their understanding of more complex content being taught.

In some subjects, such as personal, social and health education, more suitable long-term curriculum plans are in place that explicitly identify what knowledge should be taught and in what order. However, these plans are not yet being used by teachers to help pupils learn and remember more. As a result, current pupils do not have the full range of knowledge and skills needed to be ready for the next stage of their education.

Leaders are beginning to articulate more ambition for pupils with SEND and are determined to improve the provision of SEND across the school. Systems and procedures for identifying, monitoring and supporting pupils with SEND are slowly improving but are inconsistently implemented between classes. In subjects where the curriculum is more developed, such as mathematics, pupils with SEND are more likely to be successful.

Leaders are beginning to ensure that pupils' individual needs are met through a range of new initiatives. Leaders have prioritised training in SEND, including understanding the code of practice. However, leaders need to work more closely with the local authority to ensure that the needs of all pupils are fully met. For example, leaders need to ensure that annual reviews for pupils with education, health and care plans take place on time.

Leaders are taking effective action to improve behaviour. They have implemented a new behaviour policy and have built clear routines and expectations for different areas and spaces around the school. Although pupils and staff confirm that behaviour has improved, it is still variable across year groups. The number of serious behaviour incidents has reduced and the consistency with which staff approach challenging behaviours has improved. Most pupils behave well during lessons and are focused on their learning. However, there are a small number of classes where pupils are not as attentive.

Leaders have prioritised staff training for SEND, phonics teaching, mathematics and behaviour and this has led to improvements in these areas. However, there is still wide variability between classes. By focusing their attentions here, leaders have not had the time or capacity to ensure that pupils are getting their full curriculum entitlement.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose. There is sufficient evidence to support leaders' evaluations of their impact in improving reading, behaviour and provision for pupils with SEND. However, leaders' evaluation of their progress to improve the curriculum is over-inflated. The IEB includes skilled and knowledgeable professionals who know the school well, and are holding the school to account. However, they must do more to check that leaders are ensuring that pupils are getting their full curriculum entitlement.

The statement of action was submitted in October 2019 and was rejected in December 2019 because it does not set out clear timescales and dates for a proposed academy conversion. No updated statement of action was available at the time of the inspection.

Additional support

Since September 2020, the local authority has commissioned leadership support for the school from the ILP. Support from the ILP in mathematics has been particularly effective.

Leaders and staff benefit from and make effective use of the training and support from a local special school and the local English hub. From these sources, staff and leaders have predominantly received training on behaviour and phonics delivery, which has contributed to improvements in these areas.

The local authority has not monitored the progress of the school since entering into the service level agreement with the ILP in September 2020. They have trusted reports from the ILP about progress and have not checked for themselves how well the school is progressing, or the quality of education that pupils are receiving. As a result, local authority officers did not know that pupils were not receiving their full curriculum entitlement.

Evidence

Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, members of staff, members of the IEB and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last section 5 inspection.

Inspectors visited lessons, looked at pupils' work in books, heard pupils read and reviewed the school's curriculum plans. Inspectors talked with pupils during visits to lessons and at break and lunchtimes. Inspectors held separate meetings with groups of pupils to discuss their views of the school.

Inspectors reviewed a wide range of school documents, including the school's plans for improvement. Inspectors also considered 76 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 15 free-text comments, and spoke with parents and carers during the second day of the inspection. In addition, inspectors took into account 39 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.