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Michael Parker
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Parker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Primary School Blackburn

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 has 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 plans in all subjects provide sufficient guidance to staff on the key knowledge pupils need to know and remember.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been no departures or appointments of key staff. Two new governors have been appointed.

Main findings

You have steadfastly led the school since its previous inspection in May 2018. Your actions to date are leading to improvements in important aspects of the school's work. Your improvement plans, including plans put in place in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19, are ambitious. The pandemic has not affected your resolve to improve the school to good.

A sizeable number of pupils enter the school at the early stages of speaking English as an additional language. Your understanding of their needs drives everything that you do. You have made teaching spoken language and developing the pupils' vocabulary a whole-school priority. You have implemented a specific programme to ensure that pupils new to the school are given appropriate support. Alongside this, you have ensured that all pupils are taught to read by well-trained staff.

Pupils who are learning to read benefit from a well-structured phonics programme. You have introduced a 'team around phonics' to ensure that pupils' progress through this programme is carefully monitored. More recently, you have invested in extra reading books. This makes sure that pupils consistently read books that match the sounds that they are learning.

Pupils who are fluent readers are encouraged to develop a love of reading. The pupils whom I spoke with, including pupils relatively new to the country, talked enthusiastically about books they had read. They enjoy listening to stories and accessing the wide range of books available to them in the class library. They named a range of authors and described their reading preferences with confidence.

At the time of the first monitoring inspection in 2019, you had improved the quality of provision in early years. You have continued to build on these improvements. The early years leader has thoughtfully designed a curriculum that meets the needs of all children, including those with more complex needs. She carefully tracks the children's progress through this curriculum. Additional support is quickly put in place to support any children who need extra help.

Work to improve the quality of the whole-school curriculum has been ongoing since the previous inspection. You have prioritised the development of subject-specific vocabulary. Some subjects, such as science, are well ordered and the key knowledge that you want pupils to learn has been identified. Pupils talk knowledgeably about their past and current learning. Older pupils described how their previous learning about solids, liquids and gases had helped them with recent work on states of matter.

In other subjects, such as art and geography, plans do not provide enough guidance for staff on what to teach and when to teach it. For example, in art, plans do not identify which artists pupils will learn about. The pupils whom I spoke with were not as secure in their knowledge of geography and art.

Governors continue to work well with the local authority. Their ability to challenge you and other leaders about the quality of the curriculum has been strengthened. Governors understand their statutory roles and responsibilities. They are mindful of staff's well-being, including your own.

Additional support

You are openly appreciative of the support you have received from the local authority and the diocese. This has helped with your strategic planning. Support has also been used to strengthen governance and develop curriculum leadership.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, pupils, staff, governors, and representatives of the local authority and diocese to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited early years, observed phonics being taught and watched pupils reading with teachers and support staff. I viewed samples of pupils' work and reviewed curriculum plans for science, art and geography. I also considered the school improvement plan and minutes from a range of meetings, including those of the governing body.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Blackburn with Darwen. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Stillings
Her Majesty's Inspector