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12 July 2021

Louise Sennett
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Dear Mrs Sennett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Helen's CE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 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.

The school should take further action to:

- provide a consistent, whole school approach to the teaching of phonics across class, group and individual learning situations to support pupils in learning to read;

- support subject leaders to plan and sequence their subject, ensuring that what pupils are expected to know, do and remember is clear and links are made to prior knowledge.

Context

There has been significant change to staffing since the previous inspection in June 2019. There have been eight new teaching appointments. The deputy headteacher was successfully appointed as head of school in September 2020 and the assistant headteacher joined the senior leadership team.

You have not allowed COVID-19 to affect the pace of improvement. Whole school training and professional development opportunities have continued throughout the pandemic.

Main findings

There has been a tangible strengthening of leadership since the last inspection. You have demonstrated your commitment and drive to address school priorities rapidly and rigorously. You have undertaken a significant body of work to build leadership capacity. You have developed a stable, proactive team that knows the school's strengths and priorities. The team understands the wider school community well.

Alongside senior leaders, you have instilled a purposeful yet reflective approach to leadership. This is particularly evident in your work on the curriculum. It is clear that you regularly review the impact of your actions, as well as seek support and challenge from external partners. You know what is working well and what to do next.

Leaders are taking time to create a curriculum with high aspirations for pupils. They understand the importance of building pupils' knowledge from Nursery through to Year 6. In some subjects, such as English and science, the curriculum is further developed. In these subjects, pupils are becoming more secure in their learning. They talk about what they know and remember, making links to what they are learning at present. Not all subjects are at this stage of development and the impact of curriculum development in some subjects is not yet clear. Leaders have plans in place to prioritise these subjects so they can be sure pupils are able to build their knowledge in all subjects over time.

Action has been taken to improve the teaching of early reading. A new phonics programme has been introduced. Staff in early years and key stage 1 have received training. However, the programme is not yet delivered with consistency throughout the early years and key stage 1. Not all pupils practise reading with books which are precisely matched to their phonics knowledge. Adults do not consistently model blending and segmenting well. Inconsistencies are hampering the progress of some pupils.

In early years, activities are carefully considered. Children are developing successfully in all areas of learning. They cooperate and play well together. They show eagerness to take part in different tasks, with a deep concentration. In Nursery, butterflies hatched this week. Children were able to explain the life cycle of these insects. These children were deeply engaged in their learning.

Additional support

You have introduced programmes to support pupils' language and vocabulary development. Subject leaders have accessed a wealth of training opportunities to improve their subject knowledge and to help them understand how children learn. Leaders are working with the local mathematics and English hubs. The local authority has supported governors with training in both finance and human resources. Governors have also accessed National Governance Association training and have had support from the multi-academy trust.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the you, the head of school, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, members of the governing body, a representative from the diocese, a representative of the local authority and the chief executive officer of the Enhance Academy Trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I listened to pupils read with familiar adults, visited lessons, scrutinised documents including school improvement and curriculum plans, and considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for staff and parents.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the Enhance Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Zoe Lightfoot
Her Majesty's Inspector