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Claire Faubert
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Dear Ms Faubert

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School (Dewsbury)

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 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 books that match pupils' phonics knowledge so that they can read with increasing confidence and fluency
- increase the pace and focus of lessons in mathematics so there is no loss of learning time and pupils more effectively acquire the knowledge they have not remembered.

Context

Leaders' plans to improve the school were having a demonstrable and increasing impact. New systems were becoming embedded. However, COVID-19 and major staffing changes have hampered and slowed the pace of improvement somewhat.

Since the previous inspection, there have been many changes to staffing and governance. The previous executive headteacher left in December 2020. The acting head of school became the acting headteacher in January 2021. An experienced teacher became the acting assistant headteacher. In addition, three leaders and a teacher are absent from school. In September 2020, governors appointed an experienced mathematics leader. This was to increase capacity in the leadership team. Several governors have left the governing body. The governing body are recruiting three new governors with support from the diocese. Governors are aware of the impact this has had on the progress the school has made. They have appointed three newly qualified teachers and one recently qualified teacher to cover staff absence. Experienced staff who are absent plan to return by September 2021 bringing increased leadership capacity.

Main findings

There is a clear vision for the school. Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe. They know who they can talk to if they have a problem. They are confident in how to keep themselves safe online. They behave well in lessons.

Leaders' plans to become a good school are in place. Your initial priorities focused on developing mathematics and English. There are well-sequenced curriculums for these subjects, which are becoming embedded. However, new staff have required training in the curriculum and how it is delivered. Nevertheless, there are clear signs the school's work is gaining traction and that the quality of provision is improving.

In the wider curriculum, such as music, art and geography, plans are at an earlier stage. This is because some subject leaders are absent and have been unable to develop the curriculum. Their planned return next term will add vital impetus to curriculum planning in these areas. Other subject leaders are new to their role. In response, the local authority and governors are funding external support to help them plan their subject.

Leaders regularly check the quality of education that pupils receive. They do this in a range of ways, such as reviewing curriculum plans and visiting lessons. This helps leaders identify effective practice and support for teachers. As a result, leaders have created coaching teams to provide guidance and support for staff. There are clear signs that this is having a positive effect

Staff have received training to teach phonics. They teach this with fidelity to the scheme the school has chosen. In lessons, pupils engage and are learning new

sounds and how to blend them. However, leaders' checks show that a number of pupils are not where they should be. Extra phonics lessons help pupils to catch up. Reading books do not match younger pupils' phonics knowledge. This has delayed the progress of pupils' learning in phonics. Younger children would benefit from having books that match their phonics knowledge. This will help them to become confident, fluent readers quicker.

In mathematics, leaders regularly check what pupils know and remember. Your checks have shown that COVID-19 has affected some pupils' ability to remember basic mathematical facts. Lessons for younger pupils have not always helped address those gaps in knowledge. This is because the pace of learning is not quick or focused enough. Leaders must ensure that there is no loss of learning time. Older pupils have had less practice to problem solve and reason during periods of national restrictions. Pupils in Years 4 to 6 have additional daily arithmetic lessons to help them catch up quickly. This is helping those pupils get back on track.

Teachers set retrieval tasks at the beginning of lessons to check what pupils can remember from previous topics. Leaders use this to help pupils remember more knowledge over time. Some pupils who forget do not always receive support to help them remember in a timely way. Leaders need to be mindful that this may cause confusion for some pupils.

Pupils become curious learners through a well-thought-out science and computing curriculum. Plans set out the knowledge you want pupils to know and remember in a logical order. For example, in science, pupils in Year 4 learn how to set up and draw a simple circuit using basic drawings. When pupils reach Year 6, they use this prior knowledge to help them build complex electrical circuits. They can solve problems and draw diagrams using scientific symbols. This helps them to learn new facts. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the same curriculum in all subjects. Some pupils with SEND have additional lessons to support them to learn new information.

Governors have an accurate view of the school. They recognise that staffing instability has delayed the rate of improvement. They know the wider curriculum needs developing. They have struggled to recruit new governors to the governing body. The diocese has supported the governing body to recruit three new governors. Governors increasingly challenge and support leaders.

Additional support

You feel that you have benefited from the support from a national leader in education. They have worked with you to check the implementation of your curriculum. A subject leader in education supports leaders to plan provision for pupils with SEND. They also support early years staff to develop their practice. You are currently converting to academy status. The multi-academy trust are supporting you to develop leadership roles.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and two other senior leaders. I met with those responsible for governance, including the chair of governors, both online and face to face. I met a representative from the Diocese of Leeds and a local authority representative to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I completed a range of other activities during the inspection. I spoke with several pupils across all year groups. I listened to pupils reading with adults in school, visited lessons, scrutinised documentation, including school improvement and curriculum plans, and checked responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for staff and Ofsted Parent View. I also reviewed the single central record with senior leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Thomas
Her Majesty's Inspector