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Scott Jarred
Headteacher
Nexus Foundation Special School
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Dear Mr Jarred

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Nexus Foundation Special School

Following my visit to your school on 10 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 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 key staff with appropriate training and the resources required to ensure that the impending transition between phonics schemes impacts positively on the school's provision for teaching early reading.

Context

A new chair of the governing body took up post in September 2020. Your head of post-16 provision left the school in December 2020. This position is currently being covered on a temporary basis. A new head of post-16 provision has been appointed and joins the school in September 2021. A new head of English took up her position during the week of this inspection.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most pupils have been able to attend school. However, some pupils have needed to self-isolate. You also closed some 'bubbles' due to COVID-19 at different times. Additionally, some clinically vulnerable pupils had to shield during this period. The school is now fully open to pupils and staff.

Main findings

This monitoring inspection follows on from the additional remote inspection I conducted in March 2021. You have continued to work in close partnership with governors and your wider leadership team to improve all aspects of the school since that time. Despite the impact of COVID-19, much has been done to address the areas for improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in September 2019.

Since the section 5 inspection, the curriculum has been reviewed. Your four-pathway approach has been further refined. A fifth pathway has been added which enables pupils to access a more formal academic curriculum. This is aligned to the national curriculum and has helped address the issues identified with some teachers not having a clear enough understanding of what pupils have learned previously.

Pupils are better served by a common and consistent approach across the school in planning their curriculum, no matter what their pathway. A new assessment system is in the process of being introduced. All pupils now have personal 'target towers', which are also closely linked to their education, health and care plans. You recognise that there is more work to do to ensure that the curriculum model fully embeds so that the impact it has on the quality of education the school provides can be fully assessed.

You have reviewed the school's phonics provision. There is now fidelity to one phonics scheme and key staff have accessed additional training. However, you have recently decided that another phonics scheme would be more appropriate for the school. This makes sense, particularly for pupils who attend your satellite site at Wouldham All Saints Church of England Primary School, who integrate as far as possible with pupils in the mainstream school. You understand that managing this transition successfully should be a high priority.

Much work has been done to develop aspects of non-verbal communication at the school. My discussions with members of your pupil intervention team gave me confidence in the progress and the level of priority you have given to improving this

aspect of the school's work. Staff have been trained. Resources and approaches have been refined and monitored. This means that provision is now much more consistent across both sites of the school. I was able to see first-hand evidence of this in my classroom visits. A parent gave me very powerful testimony to the impact this work has had on their child.

Additional support

You welcome the support the local authority has provided since the last inspection. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted negatively on face-to-face visits, it is clear that leaders are accessing ongoing support to address the key areas that still need to be better. The guidance and support of a national leader of education have enabled you to share and review your plans for improvement.

You continue to value the close partnership the school has with Kent Special Educational Needs Trust (KSENT). The partnership with KSENT has been particularly useful in order to share good practice and in supporting staff well-being during recent times. Aspects of your plans to improve the school linked to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been influenced positively by this partnership.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other members of your wider leadership team to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the chair and three other members of the governing body. I held an online meeting with a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms on the main and satellite sites of the school. During classroom visits, I was able to talk to pupils and staff and look at examples of pupils' work. I also reviewed the single central register of checks on adults and discussed the staff recruitment processes you have in place with the designated safeguarding lead and the school's business manager.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Close
Her Majesty's Inspector