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22 July 2021

Victoria Campling
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Campling

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Aidan's Catholic Primary Academy

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 received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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:

- ensure that all subjects, including music, are planned effectively so that pupils are supported to know and remember more over time

- ensure that curriculum plans, including in physical education (PE), are reviewed in light of COVID-19 adaptations to ensure that subject content continues to be well sequenced and enables pupils to make progress
- check that the models of English presented to pupils are precise and support them to read and write accurately.

Context

Significant changes have been made to the leadership of the school. At the time of the previous inspection in December 2018 you were the deputy headteacher. In September 2019 you were appointed as the acting headteacher. This appointment was made permanent in May 2020.

A newly established governing body replaced the interim executive board in November 2019. An early years leader was appointed in September 2019 and an additional assistant headteacher appointed in March 2021.

Main findings

You and the leadership team are determined to ensure that pupils receive a high-quality education. Together, you have focused on addressing the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Staff are proud to work at the school and said it has improved. They feel trusted, respected, and involved in improving the school. Most parents and carers are very supportive of the changes you have made. They praise leaders for providing an engaging education, and a happy and safe environment.

Importance is placed on reading from the start of the early years, where children enjoy being read to as well as learning phonics. Leaders have ensured that all staff are well trained. This helps them to identify and correct mistakes which pupils make when reading. Pupils who fall behind are quickly identified and given additional support to catch up. For example, these pupils are given more time to practise the sounds they are learning. This helps them to become more fluent and confident when reading. Most pupils read fluently because the books they read are carefully matched to the sounds they are learning. This is helping pupils become stronger and more confident readers. Older pupils are knowledgeable about a range of authors and are enthusiastic about reading.

You and the leadership team have prioritised the importance of language development in the early years. Training has been provided on improving children's spoken and written language. Many staff use questioning and a range of vocabulary to support language improvement. However, this is not consistent. Some staff miss these opportunities or are not as precise with the language they use. Models of written language are not always accurate. This leads to children making mistakes in their own reading and writing.

Pupils study the full range of national curriculum subjects. Programmes of work are generally well sequenced, giving pupils opportunities to develop their understanding because ideas are revisited over time. For example, in science, younger pupils practise recording different measurements accurately. This allows them to record and interpret a range of data with greater confidence by Year 6. This is not yet the case in all subjects. For example, leaders have identified that they need to improve the curriculum in music. Plans in this subject are not well organised to support pupils to learn more about the different aspects of music.

Aspects of the PE curriculum, such as gymnastics and dance, were paused due to COVID-19 restrictions. Leaders have not fully considered how well those aspects of the curriculum are sequenced as they are reintroduced.

Leaders and governors have ambitious plans in place to further improve the school. These plans are based on an accurate evaluation of the school's current strengths and weaknesses. Leaders have identified a number of actions but need to ensure that their efforts are focused on key priorities.

Additional support

You have benefited from the continued support and advice of The Good Shepherd Catholic Trust. This support has helped to secure sufficient leadership capacity to support the ongoing improvement of the school. Reviews involving other leaders in the multi-academy trust have complemented leaders' self-evaluation.

The Diocese of Brentwood has provided useful training to help newly appointed leaders and governors to develop knowledge and understanding of their roles.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the assistant headteachers, the chief accounting officer of The Good Shepherd Catholic Trust, the chair of governors and the primary link adviser from the Diocese of Brentwood to discuss actions taken since the last inspection.

I met with the leaders for the early years, reading, science and PE. I visited the early years and phonics lessons and looked at pupils' work in science. I reviewed documentation relating to the school's evaluation and priorities for improvement and considered responses to Ofsted's parent and staff survey. I met with a group of pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief accounting officer of The Good Shepherd Catholic Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Brentwood, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Redbridge. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Nick Turvey
Her Majesty's Inspector