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Charlotte Angeli
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Dear Miss Angeli

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holdbrook Primary School and Nursery

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:

- ensure that leaders' ambitious plans for the curriculum are implemented consistently by all staff and in all subjects
- revisit its pre-pandemic approaches in supporting and encouraging parents to help their children with their learning, particularly in reading.

Context

During this academic year, while the school was closed for most pupils, all teachers continued to deliver remote education, either from home or from the school building. Training for teachers continued remotely. Leaders have had limited opportunities to monitor classroom teaching.

Since the previous section 5 inspection, the former headteacher has left the school. Following a period of interim leadership, you were appointed as headteacher. You took up your appointment in April 2019. The current deputy headteacher, special educational needs coordinator and the leader for the early years have all been appointed since the previous section 5 inspection.

Main findings

Your aspirations, along with those of other leaders and governors, for a high-quality curriculum are becoming a reality. Members of the governing body are well informed. They support and challenge school leaders during their regular meetings and school visits. New leadership has been in place for two years. You and other leaders quickly established a culture where mediocrity is not accepted. Staff, pupils and parents are now highly supportive of the school.

Your intent for the curriculum is very clear. You plan to leave as little as possible to chance so that pupils get a high-quality curriculum. To help teachers, you set out clearly for each subject what pupils are to learn. Armed with this knowledge, teachers plan the best way to teach the required learning.

There has been considerable training for teachers over this academic year. Teachers use this training to plan learning which helps pupils retain information and make progress. Teachers use different assessment strategies to check what pupils know and remember. They use this information to support pupils further.

You have rightly prioritised reading. Children in the early years have regular phonics teaching, which continued during the period of remote education and matched what they would usually learn in school. Teachers provide pupils with appropriate reading books. Teachers read to their pupils daily. Pupils are encouraged to read at home. Books that are chosen to take home have a similar level of challenge to the books in school. Restrictions on parents visiting school have interrupted the school's usual work to involve parents in supporting the development of reading. You recognise that, for some pupils, their reading ability has fallen back, leading to a barrier to their learning across the curriculum. Teachers of older pupils have been trained in the approach to reading used lower down the school, so they can help pupils who find reading difficult.

During the period of remote education, pupils followed their usual curriculum, with some adaptations. For example, in mathematics, more time was spent in reinforcing

key knowledge, with less time given to introducing new concepts. This was a carefully thought-through strategy, but as a result, choices have had to be made regarding how to catch up.

Leaders use a variety of opportunities to check that the expected curriculum is being delivered. Leaders found that there is some variation in the implementation of the curriculum. Restrictions have also meant that opportunities to involve parents more directly in pupils' learning, through school visits and workshops, have been paused.

The school is a calm and orderly place. Pupils get on well together. The personal, social, health and economic curriculum and religious education are taught in key stage 2 by a specialist teacher. There is a strong commitment to teaching fundamental British values threaded through the curriculum. The promotion of these aspects of the school's curriculum is a particular strength.

Under the school's current leadership, there is a sense of urgency to bring about the improvements needed for the school to be judged good.

Additional support

The local authority has supported leaders. School improvement partners have provided helpful support to ensure you focus on and strengthen the curriculum, including in the early years.

Evidence

During the inspection, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, the chair and representatives of those responsible for governance and a representative of the local authority. Together, we visited lessons for a short period. I observed the way pupils behaved at lunchtime. I also considered the 30 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector