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Leyton McHale
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McHale

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Swallownest Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 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:

- ensure that pupils who are not secure in their use of phonics to help them read words are taught sounds in lessons that build on what they know, remember and can do.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection, there have been a considerable number of staffing changes at all levels. These include senior staff, class teachers and support staff. You have appointed a new assistant headteacher, and a new chair of governors has joined the school.

While you have been determined to continue to prioritise improvements, COVID-19 and changes in staffing have meant that some plans have been delayed slightly.

At the time of the inspection, pupils' attendance remained high. The school reports that, to date, they have only had one year group 'bubble' closure due to COVID-19.

Main findings

You, and your senior leadership team, have taken effective steps to improve the school since the previous section 5 inspection. You have introduced the Swallownest 'gold' standard approach to behaviour management, learning and attitude. Staff and pupils follow this and strive to be the best that they can, both with learning and in life. There have been several staffing changes which have enabled you to strengthen the senior leadership team. You encourage more experienced leaders to work alongside newer colleagues. This enables less experienced staff to develop their subject leadership expertise further. This is having a positive impact upon the development of the curriculum.

The pupils in the earliest years of the school have access to daily phonics lessons. Class teachers are ambitious for their learning. You recognise that further changes are needed to deliver a systematic phonics programme across school. You aim to ensure that this will make the teaching of reading and phonics more consistent. You have plans to ensure that staff all have further training once this programme is in place. Some pupils, in the earliest stages of learning to read, are confident in segmenting and blending sounds. They are taught to use different methods, such as 'chunking', to help them to decode words. There are, however, several pupils who are not developing fluency with blending or instant recall of common words such as 'in', 'is' or 'it'. These pupils need more regular practice to catch up with reading and phonics learning. Currently, teachers do not always adapt lessons enough to enable all pupils to make progress from their starting points.

Reading is now central to the school's curriculum. You have encouraged leaders to identify effective practice. They have trialled new ways to teach reading in the school. For some pupils, this is helping to develop greater fluency and enjoyment of books.

You are passionate about developing a love of reading in all pupils. They can now read from a broad selection of new reading books in the school. Teachers match these books to pupils' reading abilities. Parents are encouraged to support pupils'

reading at home via an online library. During the third national lockdown, you, and your staff, personally delivered books to every family in the school.

Following the recent remote monitoring visit, you immediately started to review the wider curriculum. Some subjects, such as science, have already completed this review. Leaders have clear plans which identify the core knowledge for each year group to learn. Pupils then use this knowledge to form questions and investigate ideas. Leaders have ensured that learning is now progressive across year groups. Leaders have also reviewed other subjects, such as history and geography. Key knowledge has been identified, from early years through to Year 6. They are now creating plans to support teachers in delivering effective learning from September onwards. Other subjects are at the beginning of this process. You have ambitious plans to have all subjects reviewed, with improved planning in place, for September 2021.

The school's approach to assessment was not consistent in all subjects. You have reviewed how teachers assess learning, and subject leaders are starting to create short quizzes in all subjects. Teachers intend to use these to assess whether pupils are remembering the knowledge they have been taught. Leaders intend to monitor the impact of this new approach closely.

Additional support

You have made wide-reaching changes across the school since the previous section 5 inspection. The local authority views you as open-minded and receptive to new ideas to improve the school. You lead by example and encourage staff to improve themselves through further research and training in their subject leadership roles. You have encouraged staff to work with partner schools in the local area and some staff have led subject leader networks. This has resulted in a number of new initiatives being introduced. You welcome support for your leadership from the Rotherham School Improvement Service and a national leader of education. Governors also access this support.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, curriculum leaders, staff, pupils, a representative of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited phonics sessions and listened to pupils read, reviewed curriculum documents for English, history and geography. I reviewed school improvement planning and the most recent local authority school visit evaluation, along with governors' minutes linked to policy ratification. I looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 73 free-text responses, as well as 17 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrea Batley
Her Majesty's Inspector