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Alice Middleton
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Middleton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Rufford Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 July 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 had 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 revised curriculum plans in a few subjects are finalised and embedded as soon as possible
- provide support to subject coordinators, so that they can monitor the implementation, and evaluate the impact of curriculum plans
- reinforce high expectations for presentation and accuracy in their work with all pupils.

Context

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the school was affected by higher than normal staff absence, as well as an outbreak of the virus in the local area in the spring term. Leaders followed Public Health England guidance, maintaining and isolating groups of pupils where necessary to reduce the risk of infection.

The school will join the Invictus Trust on 1 September 2021. One teacher and a number of support staff have left the school since the last inspection. One new teacher joined the school this academic year. Another new teacher will join the school in September.

Main findings

The school has improved since the last inspection. You and other leaders are successfully addressing the areas for improvement identified. Teachers now make more effective use of assessment information. They prepare action plans for each class, setting out appropriate teaching strategies to address pupils' needs. For example, teachers now ask pupils to explain their answers in more detail. This helps teachers assess pupils' learning and identify next steps more accurately.

Pupils' work shows that most staff now have higher expectations of presentation and accuracy. Younger pupils' work shows that they are responding well to these higher expectations. Some older pupils' work is still not as well presented as it should be.

Pupils have regular spelling, punctuation and grammar catch-up sessions because pupils' skills in this area have dipped during the pandemic. These sessions are helping to close the gaps in pupils' learning.

Since the last inspection, you have introduced a new phonics programme. Teachers have received support and training to develop their skills to deliver phonics sessions more effectively. They now use consistent approaches, such as spotting pupils' mistakes and addressing them quickly. As a result, more pupils passed the phonics

screening check this year. The majority of pupils who did not pass the phonics screening check last year have passed this year.

Pupils love reading, and most say that they read every day. When reading to adults, pupils use their phonics knowledge to work out unfamiliar words. Books are well matched to pupils' stage of reading. Adults provide effective support. They ask questions to make sure that pupils understand unfamiliar settings or activities in the books.

Leaders target extra funding more successfully to support disadvantaged pupils. Staff now consider all information, such as academic progress, attendance and behaviour, to decide how best to support pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding. This is helping to overcome barriers to pupils' learning. With this information, governors are better able to hold leaders to account for the impact of pupil premium and catch-up funding.

The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed work on revising curriculum plans in some subjects. However, you have taken the opportunity to reflect on the curriculum. You concluded that a fresh approach was needed. Now that school life is almost back to normal, teachers have continued work to revise the curriculum with renewed vigour. Plans developed so far show how pupils' subject-specific knowledge and skills build step by step. Your intention is that pupils will study subjects in more depth to prepare pupils better for key stage 3 and beyond.

Some subject coordinators are relatively new to their roles. They are receiving support to develop curriculum plans, and have a clear understanding of next steps. Subject coordinators intend to provide training for teachers to deliver the revised plans and assess pupils' learning against new criteria. However, curriculum plans for some subjects are still at an early stage.

Leaders' plans for Rufford Primary to become a good school contain appropriate actions and timescales. They are closely aligned to the multi-academy trust the school will join in September.

Leaders have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The improvements to the teaching of phonics is a notable success. As a result, pupils now develop their skills quickly and show a love of reading.

Leaders' decision to join a local multi-academy trust has invigorated staff, who appreciate the support provided by trust staff. There is an excitement about what the future holds.

Additional support

Ahead of the official joining date, staff from the Invictus Trust are providing support for school improvement. Staff with expert subject knowledge from secondary

schools in the trust are helping to revise curriculum plans. Primary teachers are gaining greater insight into the demands of key stages 3 and 4. Equally, secondary teachers are learning more about the subject knowledge and skills the new Year 7 pupils will bring with them from primary school.

Staff value the support provided by a local English hub school to improve the teaching of phonics. An external consultant has provided support to redesign curriculum plans, along with subject leaders from the Invictus Trust.

Staff work closely with inclusion and safeguarding teams within the local authority. The school's allocated local authority school improvement officer has changed several times since the last inspection. Leaders acknowledge that this has been unavoidable, but they say that the frequent change of adviser has been unhelpful.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders, a representative of those responsible for governance, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited lessons, listened to pupils reading to a familiar adult, scrutinised work in pupils' books and spoke to pupils about their learning and staying safe. I met with subject coordinators to discuss the school's curriculum plans. I met with the school's inclusion manager and the senior leader responsible for pupil premium funding. Before the inspection, I read the school development plan and the self-evaluation document and looked at documents on the school's website.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Spilsbury
Her Majesty's Inspector