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13 September 2021

Mr Peter Hilton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hilton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Millbrook School

Following my visit to your school on 14 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 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.

Leaders and governors should take further action to:

- ensure that all curriculum plans have sufficient information about the key knowledge pupils need to learn and understand to inform teachers' planning.

Context

The recent partial closure of schools, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has delayed some leaders' plans for improvement. However, leaders have continued to make significant and effective changes which continue to have a positive impact on the improvement of the school.

There has been a restructure of the workforce, reducing the number of staff working at the school. Since the Autumn term 2020, there have been further changes in staffing. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) was appointed at the start of the Spring term 2021. Several teachers have left the school. They have been replaced with new staff.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have had to build the staffing team at Millbrook Primary. You and your staff share high aspirations and ambitions for children's education. Staff welcome the changes that you are making and feel part of the team that is helping the school to improve.

Your new leaders continue to develop the plans for the curriculum. Many leaders are now accessing a leadership programme to help them further develop their skills. They receive additional coaching opportunities that are tailored to their individual needs. This is strengthening their confidence as leaders.

A significant number of staff are new to the school. You and your leaders have worked with teachers to ensure that they know how to deliver subject plans effectively. Curriculum leaders use different ways to check that teachers are following subject plans. This is working well. Teachers told me about the 'Millbrook Way' that sets out your expectations for planning, teaching and assessment. Leaders' curriculum plans are being delivered consistently across the school.

At present, not all curriculum plans go into enough detail about the specific knowledge pupils need to know before moving on to more complex information or ideas. Leaders have already identified this issue and are in the process of writing additional topic plans where the knowledge pupils need to learn is explicit.

Leaders have identified that the partial closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on pupils' learning in mathematics. Some pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders have changed their plans to address this. Teachers are now focusing on the important things pupils need to know well.

Your leaders have continued to ensure that the curriculum for early reading is implemented well. Phonics is taught consistently. Leaders check that the books pupils read match the sounds they have learned. Pupils who need extra help read regularly to adults. Pupils practise their sounds to develop their reading fluency.

These improvements in the reading curriculum are also helping teachers to have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve in their writing. Pupils are using punctuation and grammar accurately and making more ambitious choices about the words they use in their compositions.

The new SENCo has made a good start. The support plans for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have been reviewed. Interventions are checked for their effectiveness. At this stage, adults are focusing their support for pupils with SEND on developing pupils' English and mathematics skills and behaviour management strategies in class. Leaders have clear plans in place to further improve provision for pupils with SEND by adapting teachers' planning in other subjects.

Additional support

The local authority has provided bespoke packages of support for the school. You value the support you have received, particularly for English and mathematics. This has helped you to effectively implement the reading curriculum and to improve pupils' writing at key stage 1. In mathematics, local authority support has helped teachers understand how to help pupils catch up on work they missed during the pandemic. It has also helped leaders to understand a need for pupils to explain their mathematical thinking in their books.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the assistant headteacher, the SENCo and a group of subject leaders. I met with two governors, including the chair of governors, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited lessons and spoke to pupils. I looked at pupils' work in books and heard pupils read to a trusted adult. I scrutinised leaders' development plans, the self-evaluation document and curriculum plans. I examined documentation relating to safeguarding. I considered 27 responses to the survey, Ofsted Parent View, including six free-text comments, and the 16 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

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

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector