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24 January 2022

Gareth Nation
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Minerva Primary School
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Dear Mr Nation

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Minerva Primary School

Following my visit with Paul Williams, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 14 January 2022, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in May 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of The Redstart Learning Partnership, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Costello
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 14 January 2022

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection, COVID-19 has resulted in further staff and pupil absences. This has slowed the pace of some curriculum improvements that leaders have planned. Staff have strengthened their local partnerships during the pandemic through increased community involvement, such as delivering food boxes and making home visits. However, COVID-19 has hampered leaders' plans to establish more formal engagement with parents.

There have been several, recent changes to leadership and governance. In September 2021, a new head of school took up the post. At that time, a new teacher joined the school and became the mathematics leader. In January 2022, a new assistant headteacher joined the school. Since November 2021, the early years leader has taught in the combined Reception and Year 1 class. The leader of early reading has changed recently to provide stability during a period of staff absence.

We focused on your actions to improve the areas identified at the previous section 5 inspection and the additional areas identified at the first monitoring inspection. We looked closely at English, early reading, mathematics and history. We considered how well your curriculum meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and your work to improve pupils' attendance, behaviour and personal development.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

The school's new leadership structure is in its infancy. However, early signs suggest that the leadership team have the capacity to bring about the necessary changes. The determined actions of the recently appointed head of school have already gone some way to systematically securing improvements to the quality of education. Despite the limitations caused by COVID-19, leaders have taken swift and decisive action to tackle some of the previously identified school improvement priorities.

Important systems and processes to check on pupils' learning, such as assessment, have been put in place in some subjects and improved in others. The English and mathematics curriculums have been strengthened. Nonetheless, there are still some areas that need urgent attention. For example, the curriculum is not matched closely enough to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. This hinders their learning and limits their success.

Leaders have improved the English and early reading curriculums successfully. Well-informed staff teach pupils to read effectively. Staff follow the school's phonics programme consistently. They use assessment well to identify pupils who are falling behind. Additional teaching ensures that most of these pupils catch up quickly. Consequently, few pupils in key stage 2 remain at the early stages of reading.

Leaders have introduced a well-planned and sequenced guided reading curriculum. This is helping pupils to deepen their understanding of the texts they read. Staff make useful checks on pupils' learning. Leaders have planned further improvements to formal assessment carefully. Pupils' use of vocabulary is becoming more sophisticated due to leaders' focus on spoken language. From the moment they start school, children are exposed to classrooms that have plenty of books and printed resources, such as labels and posters. Children in the early years enjoy daily poetry, rhyme and song. Books, that adults read to the children, are chosen purposefully to enrich children's language.

Leaders have reviewed and adapted the mathematics curriculum. Consequently, teachers assess precisely the work that has been covered. Nonetheless, leaders acknowledge that there are some remaining weaknesses. This is particularly evident in the effectiveness of support for pupils as they grapple with increasingly complex mathematics. Some staff do not have the knowledge and skills they need to help pupils with their learning. Leaders recognise this and have planned suitable training.

Pupils learn the full range of national curriculum subjects. However, the wider curriculum is not fully developed. Many changes to subject curriculums are very new. Some subjects, such as history, are planned well. Teachers are starting to use these plans effectively to shape interesting lessons. Others, such as music and computing, are not yet underway. Pupils learn the national curriculum content, but it has not been adapted to suit the needs of the pupils in the school. Leaders know that some subject plans need further attention to ensure that the important knowledge pupils need is identified, planned and sequenced well.

Pupils say that behaviour has got better since the new head of school started. School behaviour records confirm this. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. Exclusions have been reduced. Pupils approve of the head of school's higher academic expectations, such as increasing the frequency of mathematics teaching. Teaching assistants feel valued and appreciate the training they receive. Staff understand leaders' heightened expectations, particularly that their actions must have a positive impact on pupils' learning, as well as pastoral care.

The curriculum is enhanced by opportunities to visit and learn from others. For example, some pupils work with the neighbourhood's police community support officer to raise their awareness of local, social issues. Some pupils are becoming more resilient because they find the curriculum more ambitious and know they must try hard. Leaders know that there is still some work to be done to ensure this is the case for all pupils.

Leaders have sharpened their systems to identify pupils with speech and language needs quickly. Pupils with delayed communication have been prioritised for additional help. They have received support from school staff and external professionals. However, leaders know that the school's curriculum is not meeting the needs of pupils with SEND well enough. Too often, the support they receive from staff is not helping them achieve success.

Leaders pay close attention to pupils' attendance. The new leadership team have established positive relationships with families to help ensure some pupils attend school more regularly.

Since the first monitoring inspection, the core group, responsible for governance, has increased in number and strengthened its impact. Members meet more regularly and have a strong focus on the quality of education. They hold leaders to account for their actions to improve the school and check the progress of curriculum improvements.

Additional support

Leaders have used the local support networks wisely. For example, leaders have used guidance from the local English hub to improve staff's knowledge and skills in the teaching of early reading. Consequently, teachers and teaching assistants provide effective support for most pupils who are at the early stages of reading, including those who need to catch up. Staff have also received support from the trust's associate headteachers. This has been targeted at providing high-quality professional development for staff.

Evidence

We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the head of school, other senior leaders, including the school's leader of special educational needs and the trust's behaviour leader, subject leaders, pupils and the multi-academy trust chief executive officer and trustees.