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Tracey Burnside
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Dear Mrs Burnside

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Whittington Green School

Following my visit to your school on 20 January 2022, 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 four successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing 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.

Context

The number of pupils on the school's roll has grown significantly. This is mainly due to an increased number of pupils joining the school at the start of Year 7 in September 2021,

compared with previous years. As a result, you have appointed more specialist teaching and support staff.

You have separated the responsibility for the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and safeguarding into two distinct roles. In September 2021, a new coordinator and a new deputy coordinator for the provision for pupils with SEND were appointed. At the same time, a member of the senior leadership team took over responsibility for safeguarding.

Two teachers have joined the school to teach mathematics and English. These teachers have experience working in primary schools. They work closely with younger pupils who need extra help due to the impact of the pandemic. You have appointed a specialist teacher of geography. A librarian is now in post as part of the school's strategy to promote reading.

The pandemic has meant that some plans for improvement have only been implemented recently. A review of governance has been rescheduled and is due to take place soon.

Main findings

Senior leaders are taking decisive steps to improve the quality of education. Their plans for improvement focus on the right priorities. They are using external support to help them review the school's curriculum. They have prioritised teachers' training and development. Teachers value opportunities to reflect on their practice. Regular training helps them to consider how to plan and deliver a well-sequenced curriculum. They enjoy trying out new ideas. Some teachers are taking part in extra training so that they can support others. Everyone knows what needs to improve and how they can work together to achieve this.

Subject leaders have reviewed their key stage 3 curriculums to make sure that their plans are ambitious. Subject leaders have identified the important knowledge they want pupils to learn. They organise this knowledge logically so that pupils can build on what they already know. For example, each time pupils learn about sequences in mathematics, the sequences become more complex. Teachers break the knowledge down into manageable chunks. This helps pupils remember what they are learning. In art, pupils learn how to draw each part of a face before attempting a self-portrait. Leaders have had to change the order they intend to teach content in some subjects due to the impact of COVID-19.

Teachers give pupils plenty of chances to recall what they know. They emphasise important subject-specific vocabulary that pupils should be familiar with. Pupils say that these recaps help them remember important information. Teachers check what pupils know and correct errors or misconceptions promptly. Pupils revisit their learning when they make mistakes to ensure that they understand. They value their teachers' advice about how to improve. Most pupils take pride in their work. However, not all work in pupils' books is well presented and spelling is not corrected consistently.

New leaders are improving the provision for pupils with SEND. They are checking that information shared with staff about these pupils is appropriate. Teachers and teaching assistants are becoming more skilled in meeting these pupils' needs. However, some of these pupils do not complete work fully and have gaps in their knowledge. A few pupils with SEND in Years 7 and 8 benefit from small-group support to improve their literacy and numeracy. Leaders plan to review the key stage 4 curriculum to make sure that pupils with SEND study appropriate qualifications. Parents and carers appreciate the chance to discuss the needs of their children with SEND during after-school drop-in sessions.

There is an increased focus on the importance of reading and literacy across the curriculum. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 benefit from timetabled reading lessons in the library. They enjoy choosing texts from different styles and genres to inspire their own writing. Some pupils in Year 7 struggle to read fluently and with confidence. A trained teacher helps these pupils improve their knowledge of phonics so that they can decode text. Staff act as positive role models for reading. Teachers share texts relevant to what pupils are studying during 'drop everything and read' sessions. While older pupils appreciate the importance of reading, many do not read regularly. Strategies to improve reading are relatively new. Their implementation has been slowed by COVID-19.

Governors are well informed about leaders' actions to improve the quality of education. They check what leaders tell them by making their own visits to school. Governors are positive about the opportunities presented by a growing school. Newly recruited staff have introduced fresh ideas for improvement. Governors ensure that any staff with concerns about their well-being are given appropriate help.

Leaders have reorganised the safeguarding team to make sure that pupils get the right support. They know the risks that pupils face in the local community, and how these have changed during the pandemic. Pupils learn how to stay safe, including online. Leaders take appropriate and timely action when a pupil is at risk of harm. They provide these pupils with close support in school and seek help from external agencies when needed.

During my visit, leaders acted quickly to improve some minor safeguarding procedures. Governors are due to update their safeguarding training so that they are aware of the latest changes to the national guidance.

Additional support

Leaders work closely with the local authority to evaluate the impact of their work and identify their next steps. The local authority has arranged for teachers and leaders to attend curriculum and leadership training. Staff are positive about the impact that this training is having on their practice. The local authority has forged links with local schools and a national leader of education to support leaders' work to improve reading and the provision for pupils with SEND. This work is ongoing. Governors are keen to develop their

roles. The local authority has arranged a review of governance. This review is scheduled to take place imminently.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead and the leader of the provision for pupils with SEND. I held a meeting with three governors, including the vice-chair, and met with two local authority representatives remotely to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I discussed the curriculum with teachers of mathematics, art and geography, as well as meeting with teachers of other subjects. I met with the subject leader of English and the librarian to discuss reading. I reviewed a sample of pupils' workbooks. I spoke with two groups of pupils and heard some pupils read to an adult.

I scrutinised a range of documents, including senior leaders' evaluations of the school's work and their plans to improve the school. I reviewed a range of policies and safeguarding records. I considered minutes relating to the school's governance and a recent review of the school carried out by the local authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff
Her Majesty's Inspector