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Emma Cadman
Principal
The Hill Primary Academy
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Dear Mrs Cadman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Hill Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 1 February 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement or inadequate 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

You were appointed as principal in September 2019, shortly after the most recent inspection. The early years leader joined the school in September 2020, and a vice-principal was appointed in September 2021. You have recently appointed an assistant principal, who will join the school at Easter 2022.

You told me about the impact of COVID-19 on your school plans and on the implementation of your curriculum. The pandemic has particularly affected your teaching of reading to the current Year 1 pupils, such as two 'bubble' closures when they were in the early years. The pandemic has also delayed the full implementation of some parts of your planned curriculum, for example where you are making adaptations to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. To make up for the gaps in learning caused by the pandemic, you have put in place the multi-academy trust's 'Ready to Progress' recovery curriculum to help pupils catch up.

Main findings

You have taken effective steps to address all of the areas for improvement identified at the most recent inspection. The main areas relate to the improvement of reading, both in phonics with the younger pupils and, more widely, reading across the school. Supported by the trust, you have acted with urgency to improve reading.

In particular, you have implemented a programme of systematic synthetic phonics. To ensure it is implemented effectively, you have invested substantially in reading books which are matched exactly to the scheme. You have made sure that teachers and teaching assistants are trained in the scheme. As a result, pupils' reading is improving. The weakest readers in key stage 1 and lower key stage 2 are making good progress in their reading, because you have made sure they are taught by trained teachers and teaching assistants, using the scheme effectively.

You have also taken determined action to improve reading across the school by raising the profile of reading. With the trust's support, you have invested substantially in new reading books, including non-fiction, for pupils to choose. Books are now a prominent aspect of the fabric of the school, in classrooms, on corridors, and in the library. You have invested in texts which are engaging for pupils, and which complement the curriculum and, in particular, pupils' vocabulary. For instance, you have provided books which match and support the work pupils are doing in art. As a result, there is evidence that teachers are making use of subject-specific language. This is indicative of your high expectations and curriculum ambition.

Evidence from records of reading shows that reading enjoys a high profile in school. You have clearly worked hard to engage parents in supporting their children with their reading. There is also evidence that teachers keep a close eye on what pupils are reading and, higher up the school, move away from phonics and on to wider aspects of reading such as fluency and expression.

You were also asked to raise achievement across the school. Your strategy to do so is partly driven by improvements to reading. It is also driven by the trust's support in adding to the capacity of the school's senior leadership team. Additionally, it is driven by a focus on strengthening the curriculum. Although the impact of the pandemic has delayed your anticipated plans, you are well on the way to implementing your revised curriculum in all

subjects. Curriculum plans show that you are committed to delivering subject knowledge and skills which are ambitious for your pupils.

The role of the governing body is important in the improvements you have made and are making. Its recent recomposition puts it in a deliberately stronger position to enable it to challenge and support leaders. The chair of governors has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for continued development.

You were also asked, at the previous inspection, to improve the progress that children make through early years by ensuring that adults give children clear direction and support in practising their skills in reading, writing and mathematics. This is happening. The early years leader has a strong understanding of, and grip on, the early years foundation stage (EYFS) learning and development areas. You are working together to ensure that the EYFS prime and specific areas are central to your curriculum. As a result, you are effectively building a foundation for inspiring children's curiosity and enjoyment for learning. There is a shared understanding between you and the EYFS lead about the necessity for the school's curriculum to connect EYFS with Year 6, and this work is underway.

Your plans for improvement are appropriate for the task in hand. We spoke about how you could sharpen them a little in places, just to support you further in your actions to improve the school.

Additional support

The multi-academy trust is providing valuable support to you and your colleagues in the implementation of your curriculum. The trust is particularly working with you to continue the prioritisation of reading, especially phonics. The trust is also working with you to continue the implementation of your curriculum plans across subjects, where the pandemic has slowed your intentions.

Evidence

During the inspection, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection, I met with you, the principal. I also met with other senior leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer and a senior trust officer who is working with the school. I spoke with staff and pupils, and met the chair of governors in a virtual meeting.

I visited lessons with you, including phonics and reading lessons. I visited the early years setting with the early years lead. I reviewed records relating to pupils' reading and heard pupils reading. I considered your school self-evaluation, your school improvement plan and curriculum plans. I checked the single central record for the checks made on the most recently employed staff.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of Astrea multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Shaw
Her Majesty's Inspector