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Keith Rondeau  
Headteacher  
St Mark's CofE Primary School  
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Dear Mr Rondeau

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mark's CofE Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 April 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 at the request of the regional director for the West Midlands to provide assurance that the school is improving following the judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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:

**The school continues to require improvement. Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action toward the school becoming a good school.**

The school should take further action to:

- Make explicit how the vocabulary and knowledge children learn in the early years connects to the curriculum content they will learn in key stage 1 and beyond.

## **Context**

There has been substantial change to the school's leadership since the previous inspection. You joined the school as headteacher in April 2019 and your deputy headteacher started in September 2020. Two new senior leaders joined the school in September 2021. Your senior leadership team has been expanded to include leaders of English and mathematics. The deputy headteacher took on the role of special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) in January 2022.

At the start of this year, many pupils and staff were absent due to COVID-19, causing some disruption. However, your plans for improvement have not been substantially hampered by COVID-19.

## **Main findings**

Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, you have brought about transformation in the school. You have put in place the right team to drive school improvement. Underpinning all your actions is a drive to provide the best quality of education for your pupils and to improve their life chances. You, your senior team and the governors share this moral imperative.

You are implementing this vision through a series of well-thought-out actions. These actions stem from your highly reflective approach to identifying 'why' there needs to be change, 'how' the change will happen and 'what' success will look like. Your decisions are always rooted in research. You make sure teachers understand the 'why', 'how' and 'what' before you begin to implement your plans. You train staff thoroughly before asking them to take a new approach and support them as they make the necessary changes to their practice. All the time, you and your senior leaders check closely that the change is happening, and pupils are benefiting from it. Your approach is leading to sustainable improvement.

You have, appropriately, prioritised reading in your drive for improvement. You have made sure that all staff know how to teach children to read. As a result, the newly introduced phonics programme is being implemented effectively. Reception children are keeping up with it well. Older pupils who are not yet fluent readers are getting the help they need to catch up. The reading books pupils take home are carefully chosen to help them practise the letter sounds they are learning. Teachers are promoting a genuine love of reading by reading carefully selected books to pupils to help them appreciate a broadening range of quality texts.

You are well supported by your able and highly committed senior team. In turn, your subject leaders are increasingly driving improvements to the quality of education. In September, your curriculum leader identified that the school's purchased curriculum

was not serving pupils well. Its weaknesses were exacerbated by learning being missed due to COVID-19. Subsequently, subject leaders have rewritten the curriculum in each subject. This is also the case in the early years. Planning across the school now sets out key knowledge that pupils need to learn at each stage to achieve in line with the national curriculum.

Your early years leader is taking a similar systematic and thoughtful approach to building the curriculum for the youngest children in the school. The developing curriculum is, increasingly, helping children learn to communicate clearly and to gain a broad vocabulary by the time they leave the Reception class. More and more, the early curriculum is providing children with the knowledge they need to help them make sense of the subjects they will learn in Year 1 and beyond. At this stage, these links are not explicit. Therefore, you cannot be certain that early years provides all the knowledge that pupils need for learning the national curriculum as they move on through the school.

The school's reworked curriculum is ambitious for all pupils and particularly for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Since assuming responsibility as SENCo, your deputy headteacher has begun to revise the processes for identifying, assessing and meeting pupils' needs. Her decisions are focused on the determination that these pupils are taught the curriculum in ways that ensure they achieve the best possible outcomes.

Teachers are delivering the new curriculum increasingly well. This is because you provide the training they need to teach it confidently. As a result, they are planning more effective sequences of lessons that are helping pupils to gradually build knowledge in all subjects. Teachers are checking that pupils are learning what they have been taught. This assessment is still quite new in some subjects, but becoming more effective as time goes by.

Governors know the school well. They now seek to test out what they are told about what is working well. They are more confident to challenge or check that the right things are happening in practice.

### **Additional support**

You have drawn on well-chosen external support. You are open to challenge and responsive to feedback. You and your team have used advice thoughtfully. You have valued the oversight of the local authority as a means of quality assuring the whole process.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, who is also the SENCo. I also met with other senior leaders, the chair of the governing body, and three other members of the governing body. I spoke with a representative of the local

authority and a representative from the Diocese of Worcester to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I also heard some pupils read to their teaching assistants. I observed two subject leaders carrying out monitoring activities, including their discussions with pupils to find out if the pupils had remembered previously taught knowledge. I spoke to some parents as they collected their children at the end of the school day.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Worcester, 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

Sandra Hayes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**