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Philip Hynan
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Dear Mr Hynan

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of St Michael's C of E Primary Academy, Handsworth

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 26 October 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, other staff, trustees, the chair of the local governing body and a representative from the diocese the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also spoke to pupils, looked at samples of work, visited a range of lessons, scrutinised school improvement plans and the minutes of governors' meetings. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the individual plans in place for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are specific, link closely to their individual needs and move their learning forward in small, bite-size steps.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have been relentless in your focus on improving the learning offer for pupils. This has been successful. You have undertaken a rapid and effective journey of improvement. You have prioritised the right things, in the right order. Staff, pupils, parents and carers recognise this. You have made sure that each subject has a clearly defined pathway in place. You aim high in what you want to achieve. You have a curriculum in place for the early years. This links into what comes next in Year 1. Everybody is on board with this. However, not everyone in the school is clear enough on how the curriculum subjects build on the foundations of learning that start in Reception.

The work in pupils' books is consistent with improvements in the curriculum. The passion and pride in their learning jump off the page. Pupils thoroughly enjoy speaking about their learning. They remember a great deal. They make links across and between subjects. They bounce ideas off each other with confidence and clarity. Listening to pupils sing a piece played on the steel pans earlier in the day, recite Latin and explain how igneous rocks are formed was a powerful experience.

Leaders' improvements to the curriculum are having a positive impact on most pupils' achievement. However, for some pupils with SEND, the provision they are experiencing is not fully meeting their needs. This is because the targets in their individual plans are too many and too vague. They do not drill down well enough to what each pupil needs at that moment in time. This leaves some pupils with SEND drifting in their learning, or staff working hard but not always on the right things.

You are equipping staff with the knowledge, skills and resources to teach the curriculum well. They respond well to this. The structures and sequences that you have put in place are clearly visible, no matter which classroom you walk into. Staff value the support and training they receive. They use a range of strategies, such as quizzes, questions and essays, to good effect. These strategies combine in a commanding way. Pupils gain knowledge that remains with them over time.

You are committed to being ambitious for the whole school community. You have focused not only on the curriculum but have also prioritised pupils' care and their social and emotional needs in equal measure. Trust leaders have sat alongside school leaders over the last two years. Their guiding hand, probing questions and targeted support have kept the school moving forward in the right direction at the right pace.

Pupils' personal development is as important to you as their academic achievement. The precision with which you consider the wider aspects of school life is impressive. Pupils' politeness, interest and skill in engaging in conversations with visitors is notable.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Birmingham Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Birmingham, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Foulkes
His Majesty's Inspector