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Sarah Murphy
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Dear Mrs Murphy

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Werburgh's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 May 2021, 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 at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that staff in Year 5 and Year 6 have access to high-quality phonics training so that they can support those pupils who are at an early stage of reading in key stage 2
- review curriculum plans, for example in history, to ensure that the key knowledge that pupils will learn is clearly identified and sequenced
- develop the role of subject leaders in science, history and geography to enable them to monitor their areas of responsibility more effectively
- ensure that the subject leaders of science, history and geography have a clear understanding of how these subjects are developed from the early years.

Context

Since the most recent section 5 inspection on 26 and 27 February 2020, a small number of teachers have left the school and two new teachers have joined. There have been significant changes to the senior leadership team with regard to roles and responsibilities and a new early years leader has been appointed. A new chair of governors is in post.

Despite the disruption caused by the pandemic and significant staffing issues, teachers have continued to deliver education to pupils learning at home and in school. However, COVID-19 has had an impact on leaders' actions to further improve the school. Leaders' plans to develop subjects in the wider curriculum have been delayed.

Main findings

Under your steer, curriculum leaders and staff have started on their journey to design an ambitious curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). You have implemented an appropriate improvement plan, which correctly identifies the actions that need to be taken by governors, senior leaders and staff to improve the school to good.

You have revised the programme for the teaching of phonics so that it better supports pupils to build up their phonics knowledge. You have invested heavily in high-quality books which are well matched to the sounds that pupils in the early years and key stage 1 have learned. This means that pupils are improving their fluency in reading. Staff's better use of assessment ensures that pupils who are struggling to read are identified more quickly and are given appropriate support.

You have ensured that pupils at the early stage of reading in key stage 2 learn phonics to help them to read more accurately. However, staff in Years 5 and 6 have not had access to the same high-quality training as their colleagues in key stage 1

and early years. This means that these staff lack confidence and competence in supporting older pupils who are less proficient readers. That said, some pupils in key stage 2 show a real love of reading. Those who spoke with me talked with confidence about their favourite authors and the types of books they like to read. For example, pupils said that reading poetry gives them a sense of calm. Others described enjoying reading historical non-fiction books to find out more information about the world wars.

Your plans to improve the quality of education in subjects such as science, history and geography faltered at the start of the pandemic. These plans are firmly back on track. For example, in subjects such as science, plans set out clearly the knowledge that pupils will learn and the order in which it will be taught. However, curriculum plans in other subjects, such as history, do not focus strongly enough on the key knowledge that pupils need to acquire as they move through the school.

Subject leaders have received training to help them to monitor the effectiveness of their subjects. This training has led several subject leaders to check how well the curriculum is being delivered. These checks are not as well established in science, history and geography. In addition, some subject leaders do not have a secure understanding of the building blocks that children need to acquire in the early years to allow them to access the curriculum in key stage 1.

As a result of your actions to improve the quality of education, some pupils know more and remember more of their learning. For example, pupils used prior learning in geography to talk to me about their historical study of the transatlantic slave trade. In science, pupils explained to me how their knowledge of a fair test helped them to understand the concept of variables in upper key stage 2.

Pupils now have a better understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils spoke confidently about the rule of law and democracy. They are developing their understanding of the differences of life in modern Britain. For example, pupils understand the variety of families, including same-sex families, and sexual orientation.

You have taken appropriate action to increase the number of pupils attending activities which will enrich their experiences beyond their academic studies. Prior to the start of the pandemic, clubs, which were mainly sports-based, were not well attended. This was because these clubs were held after school and some pupils were unable to attend. You plan, from September 2021, to operate these clubs at lunchtime to enable more pupils to experience and enjoy them.

Governors have a secure understanding of what the school does well and the further improvements that are still needed. They act as critical friends, offering support and challenge in equal measure. Governors fulfil their statutory duties diligently. The special educational needs coordinator has a clear overview of the pupils in the school and their needs. She works well with teachers to make suitable

adaptations to the content of the curriculum to ensure that pupils with SEND have the same access to the curriculum as their friends.

Parents, carers and pupils hold you and your staff in high regard. Some parents commented positively about the high-quality remote education that you and your staff provided. Staff appreciate the consideration that you and other senior leaders give to their workload and well-being.

Additional support

You and staff are receptive and appreciative of the support from the local authority, external agencies and educational consultants. You have used this support to drive forward improvements in the curriculum and leadership skills.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance, a representative of the local authority, a representative from the diocese and an external educational consultant to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I spoke with pupils and looked at examples of their work. I visited phonics lessons, accompanied by you, and observed pupils reading with an adult. I reviewed curriculum plans for reading, science, history and geography, the school improvement plan, governors' minutes and documentation relating to safeguarding.

I took account of the 11 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including seven free-text comments, and the 24 responses to the staff online survey.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector