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Kelly Dunne
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Dear Ms Dunne

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

Following my visit to your school on 20 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:

- set out and sequence the most important knowledge for pupils to learn across the curriculum
- use assessment effectively, so that pupils know and remember more
- ensure that teachers identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) quickly and work closely with parents to ensure that pupils' needs are met fully.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, you have reorganised the leadership of several subjects. The curriculum leader for mathematics has left the school. You are leading the mathematics curriculum on a temporary basis.

Pupils from seven different year groups are organised into five classes. Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes from the Reception Year through to the end of Year 4.

Main findings

The most recent section 5 inspection took place in February 2020. In the year that followed, you met the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and chose the right improvement priorities for the school. You moved swiftly to strengthen reading and mathematics. You put leadership in place for several different subjects. Although curriculum plans are at an early stage in some subjects, staff are keen to develop these.

You have strengthened the leadership of reading. Staff are confident of delivering a well-sequenced programme of phonics. Their teaching is increasingly effective. As a result, pupils read with growing confidence and fluency. Teachers carefully check pupils' knowledge of sounds to help them catch up when needed. You provide a wide range of reading experiences for pupils, which they enjoy.

You have introduced a new curriculum for mathematics. You now expect all pupils to learn the same curriculum content. Teachers provide extra support for those pupils who need it. Consequently, you have successfully raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can learn in mathematics.

Leaders have set out what they want pupils to learn in other subjects. However, they have not yet set out the order for teaching key knowledge. Leaders have been unsure of how to plan this due to the challenges of teaching mixed-age classes. Leaders feel better placed to overcome this challenge. You have wisely set aside time for staff to work together on this before the end of this school year.

As leaders develop the curriculum, they are considering how to check what pupils know and can remember in different subjects. For example, in history and geography, teachers have begun to focus assessment on the most useful information and ideas that they think pupils must know. However, this piece of work is in its infancy. If successful, you plan to extend it to other curriculum areas. In the meantime, there is no coherent approach to assessing pupils in the current curriculum.

You strive for pupils with SEND to learn as much of the curriculum as possible. There are some helpful adjustments in place to help pupils learn. You have prioritised time for staff to meet and review the progress of pupils with SEND. However, sometimes teachers lack confidence in identifying pupils' needs quickly enough. They do not always work closely with parents to produce high-quality learning plans which meet pupils' needs.

In March 2020, a monitoring inspection highlighted the need for governors to challenge and support school leaders to improve the curriculum. In response, there is a schedule of meetings in place between governors and curriculum leaders for this work to commence.

Additional support

The school has received support from the local English Hub to improve the reading curriculum. This is complemented by support for the leadership of reading, commissioned by the trust.

In addition, the trust provides valuable opportunities for curriculum leaders to meet with their counterparts from other schools. Curriculum leaders also benefit from training provided by a range of other subject associations and networks. The trust has provided useful guidance to governors to support more robust discussions with school leaders.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the special educational needs coordinator, the education standards manager for the multi-academy trust and representatives of the local governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

In addition, I met with a range of curriculum leaders and carried out visits to lessons. I scrutinised documents, including the school improvement plan. I considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including one free-text response, and 11 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Plymouth CAST multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Plymouth, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Lydia Pride
Her Majesty's Inspector