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Dear Mrs Field

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Gregory's Church of England Primary School, Marnhull

Following my visit to your school on 6 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 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school 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 pupils in the early stages of reading are provided with books matched precisely to the sounds they know.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection, there have been no significant changes to the teaching staff. Three governors have joined the school, including a new safeguarding governor.

An additional monitoring inspection took place in February 2021. Since then, leaders have continued to strengthen curriculum content for many subjects, such as personal, social, relationship and health education (PSRHE) and physical education (PE). However, COVID-19 delayed the implementation of a new early reading programme and it has only recently begun.

Main findings

You, with other leaders and governors, are working on the right priorities to improve the school. Improvement plans are precise and address the previously identified weaknesses. They focus on building a consistent and well-sequenced curriculum. Leaders and governors are beginning to make more frequent checks on what pupils remember of the planned curriculum. However, this work is at an early stage.

Leaders' improvements to the wider curriculum are beginning to take shape. For example, you recently redesigned the PSRHE curriculum. You have carefully considered what is taught in each year group and when. Learning is well sequenced and is helping pupils to know more and remember more, year on year. Older pupils connect their understanding of 'fraud' and 'scams' to online safety confidently. Still, some improvements are very recent. Subjects such as art and design and PE need more time to become fully established.

You recently changed the way early reading is taught. All staff have been trained in a new programme. There is now a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. However, some younger pupils who struggle to read are given books that do not match the sounds they know. Therefore, these pupils are not gaining the experience to be confident and fluent readers quickly enough.

In the older classes, there is a strong focus on developing pupils' reading. Teachers ensure that pupils use various techniques, such as inference and prediction, when discussing books and poetry. Pupils say this is helping them to become better readers.

Governors are playing a vital role in holding leaders to account for the quality of education. They do not shy away from asking challenging questions of leaders. For example, governors met with the mathematics leader to check how well pupils are developing their reasoning skills. They have also met with the special educational needs coordinator to assure themselves that pupils with special educational needs are receiving the right support to help them achieve well.

Additional support

You and subject leaders have benefited from an extensive range of additional support. Work with a local trust has helped your staff to identify gaps in curriculum planning. This work is proving effective in helping subject leaders to select the most important knowledge and skills that pupils should learn and remember over time.

You continue to draw on valuable support and challenge from an external school improvement adviser. This is beginning to help you and other leaders pinpoint areas to prioritise in order to secure improvements to pupils' learning. You are planning to undertake work with the local authority and other schools to share best practice around the curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, subject leaders, representatives of those responsible for governance and a local authority representative to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I reviewed documents provided by the school, including curriculum plans, and looked at examples of pupils' work. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to pupils read to staff. I looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 18 free-text responses, and considered five staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Dale Burr
Her Majesty's Inspector