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Noreen Dunn
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dunn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Knowleswood Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 June 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 four 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 improvement plans include precise and measurable outcomes, so that leaders and governors can accurately evaluate the impact of their actions to improve the school.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, there have been significant changes in staffing. Seven teachers and the early years leader left the school. Six new teachers have joined. Two new assistant headteachers have been appointed. One of the assistant headteachers is fulfilling a temporary deputy headteacher role. Several governors have left the governing body and new governors have joined.

At times during the pandemic, staffing in school has been significantly affected by COVID-19. During the spring term 2021, you temporarily reduced the number of pupils attending school on Fridays to manage this issue. All pupils are now attending school full time and for the full school week. At the time of the inspection, staff from the other school in the Cavendish and Knowleswood federation were in school to cover for a number of absent teachers.

Main findings

Since the previous section 5 inspection, leaders have taken a number of important actions to strengthen key aspects of the school's work. You have maintained a clear focus on your work to improve the school, despite managing some significant staffing issues.

You have ensured that the curriculum sets out high expectations of what all pupils can achieve in all subjects. Subject leaders have identified the key knowledge that they want pupils to learn. Curriculum plans clearly set out what pupils should be able to know and remember in each subject. Leaders are now developing the curriculum so that it will further support pupils to remember important knowledge from one year to the next.

The quality of the curriculums for reading, writing and mathematics had begun to improve at the time of the last inspection. Leaders have successfully strengthened them further. In mathematics, the careful sequencing of subject content is helping pupils to build their mathematical knowledge over time. You have ensured that all staff are now well trained in the teaching of phonics. Leaders check that staff have a consistent approach to teaching phonics sessions. Pupils are now supported well to become confident readers.

You have improved the curriculum so that it now promotes a wide variety of faiths and cultures. You have changed how the wider curriculum is taught to pupils. You identified that your previous approach had resulted in pupils not having a clear understanding about what subjects they were learning. For example, pupils were unsure whether the knowledge that they were studying in lessons related to geography or history. Your new curriculum has rectified this. The new approach you have introduced for pupils to record their work allows pupils to refer to their previous learning. This is helping them to make connections between their learning and to build on what they already know.

The use of assessment has been strengthened across the wider curriculum. In some subjects, teachers now consistently check pupils' understanding before they move on to new learning. Teachers plan sequences of lessons that address any gaps in pupils' knowledge and build upon what pupils already know from previous years. You are now working to embed this improving practice across all subjects.

You recognise that the proportion of pupils who are frequently absent from school remains too high. Before the pandemic, attendance had begun to improve. COVID-19 has hampered the school's work to reduce pupils' absence. As soon as all pupils returned to school in the spring term 2021, you redoubled your work to improve attendance. Pupils' attendance is closely monitored. Working with the local authority, you are taking action where attendance does not improve quickly. You have engaged a local charity to build closer relationships with some families whose children have low attendance. Improving attendance remains a priority.

During the inspection, pupils behaved well in their lessons. However, some staff raised concerns about the challenging behaviour of a small minority of pupils. You have refined systems to support these pupils to regulate their behaviour. This includes support for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. You recognise that some pupils still need greater support and are working closely with the local authority adviser to address this.

Governance has strengthened since the previous inspection. Governors know the school and the community well. New governors have joined and there is a broader range of expertise on the governing body. Training for governors is improving their ability to assess the actions of leaders. Minutes of governors' meetings show that they are beginning to ask more probing questions of leaders.

Leaders identify the right priorities for school improvement. However, there are some inconsistencies in how well leaders break down these priorities into smaller steps in action plans. Timescales for improvement are not consistently well defined. While governors check how well you are tackling the areas for improvement from the last inspection, variability in the quality of your improvement plans makes it more difficult for governors to assess the success of leaders' actions.

Additional support

The school benefits from the support provided by the Cavendish and Knowleswood federation. This includes the support of specialist leaders in education as well as support with staffing when teachers are absent. Subject leaders meet with colleagues from the other school in the federation to develop the curriculum in their subjects. Leaders and teachers value this partnership.

The local authority has provided a wide range of support, including support to improve attendance, behaviour and to develop pupils' writing. External consultants have helped to establish the school's phonics programme.

Evidence

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

I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's improvement plans, curriculum plans, minutes from governors' meetings and the school's single central register. I listened to pupils read, visited lessons and looked at pupils' books. I also took account of the 37 responses to Ofsted Parent View, and considered 36 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

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

Yours sincerely

Graham Findlay
Her Majesty's Inspector