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Dear Mrs Muller

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Yaxham Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 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:

- improve the reading curriculum plans so they identify the key knowledge and skills pupils need to know

- make sure all adults know how to support pupils and their use of phonics when pupils read to them.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, there has been a new early years teacher appointed. An experienced governor has been elected as chair of the governing body.

Main findings

Leaders have concentrated on the recommendations from the previous inspection with some success. Staff understand the expectations for what a pupil can achieve at their age. Staff have looked at pupils' work from other schools to see how their pupils' performance compares. There is a sharper focus on identifying pupils' starting points and checking their achievement over time. Leaders know that the next step is also to check what content pupils know and remember.

During the national lockdowns, pupils at home did not write as much as they usually do when they are at school. The lack of practise has affected pupils' handwriting and their stamina. Some pupils are now 'back in their stride', writing neatly and at length. For some pupils, this is taking longer. Pupils are correcting spelling over time and their books show improvements in this area.

The mathematics curriculum is clearly structured. The plans help pupils to build mathematical knowledge step-by-step. There are many opportunities to revisit key learning. Staff are of the view that they are more confident in their mathematics teaching due to the training and support they have received.

The reading curriculum is not as well planned as the mathematics curriculum. Leaders have thought carefully about the choice of texts that pupils read in class. However, leaders have not considered which literary knowledge and skills for comprehension to teach and in which order. Pupils have frequent opportunities to read during the school day. Pupils told me that they love reading and if they were the headteacher they would decide to have even more reading.

There is a clear sequence for the teaching of phonics. Staff are knowledgeable about when pupils should know tricky and more difficult words. Teachers regularly check pupils' progress with learning to read so that pupils are given books that match the sounds they know. However, support for pupils when reading to an adult is variable. Weaker practice was seen such as encouraging a pupil to 'sound out' but not providing any further support or guidance when needed.

The wider curriculum is in its infancy. Plans are in place and are being implemented. However, the plans vary in quality. The plan for history is ordered logically and identifies the key content pupils should know and remember. Pupils talk confidently about their learning as a result. They are less confident in their knowledge of science. Leaders' self-evaluation of curriculum improvement is too generous.

Governors are holding school leaders to account. They have challenged leaders about the information they are receiving, particularly in relation to the teaching of English. Governors are asking the right questions regarding the support provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Governors have also looked carefully at parental views. In the most recent Ofsted survey, Parent View, a third of parents who responded would not recommend the school.

Additional support

Governors and leaders have benefitted from the support provided by the local authority. A local authority improvement board provides guidance for governors. School leaders are supported with auditing provision and action planning.

Teachers and school leaders value the informal links with the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust. Teachers and leaders have benefitted from networks and curriculum development training.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, representatives of those responsible for governance, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with staff and pupils. I watched pupils reading to staff. I observed Reception and Year 1 pupils in a lesson. I looked at a sample of pupils' books from pupils in key stage 2. I considered documentation and the school's website. I took account of 39 responses given to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, including 27 free-text comments. I reviewed 10 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector