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12 July 2021

Jane King
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Dear Mrs King

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Moat Hall Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 30 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 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 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 not taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the key stage 2 curriculum covers the full breadth of the national curriculum.

Context

There have been a small number of staff changes since the previous section 5 inspection but, overall, the school has remained stable.

Main findings

During the COVID-19 pandemic, you and your governors have worked hard to ensure that pupils and staff are safe and well cared for. You have placed pupil well-being at the heart of your efforts. However, you accept that there has been less priority on school improvement recently. As a result, there has been insufficient attention given to addressing the key issues presented in the last inspection report and the rate of improvement has been too slow. Consequently, some key weaknesses remain in mathematics, the development of the wider curriculum and identification and support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

You have sustained a focus on English and mathematics. Monitoring and reviews carried out by staff, together with inspection evidence, show that the English curriculum is more effective than the mathematics curriculum across the school. However, other priorities have slipped. This is because the school development plan has not been kept up to date. Governors are unsure what the current priorities are. They have not checked that the actions needed to become a good school are being implemented or held you and other leaders to account sufficiently.

You have been successful in improving the reading culture across the school. Children are encouraged to enjoy books and listen to stories from the minute they join school, including in 'Moat Hall Minis', your provision for two- to three-year olds. You have purchased exciting and appealing books to entice pupils to read. You are in the process of replenishing your school library and provide an online resource for pupils. Expectations have been raised and pupils are expected to read regularly and are rewarded for this.

Improvements have also been made in increasing pupils' ability to write at length. Writing in Year 1 books is impressive. Pupils use good vocabulary and express their ideas well. You have introduced a new scheme to teach grammar, punctuation and spelling. Older pupils now have a daily lesson on this aspect of writing. This is helping pupils to write more complex sentences and produce higher quality work. You have also focused on handwriting. However, cursive writing is not yet evident in Year 2 and this needs further attention. Nevertheless, standards in writing at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are rising.

Progress in mathematics has been less successful. Teachers have judged that less than half of pupils in Year 2 are working at age-related expectations. You have identified that pupils still struggle with number work and mental arithmetic. You have provided training for staff to ensure that work is better matched to pupils' abilities. Teachers have also identified pupils who need additional support. 'Catch up' interventions are due to start imminently. The use of mathematics apparatus has also been increased to help pupils. For example, children in Reception Year wear number pattern necklaces to help them visualise numbers to 10 and find number bonds. However, pupils are still not reaching the standards needed for the next stage of their education, including in the early years. Lessons for older pupils lack challenge and pupils do not apply problem-solving and reasoning skills to tasks set.

You have continued to follow a topic approach to teaching the wider curriculum. However, activities are not well sequenced or connected. Too often, there is an absence of subject knowledge and skills in activities set. For example, pupils completed a word search in science about living things but learned little about the classification of different groups. As a result, pupils are not on track to reach the expectations set out in the national curriculum. Leaders were tasked at the last inspection with ensuring that the curriculum is planned and sequenced to build pupils' knowledge and skills over time in all subjects. This aspect has not been addressed. Too many subjects have yet to be planned sequentially, and in detail, and pupils do not currently learn a modern foreign language.

The profile of pupils with SEND has been raised. The coordinator ensures that referrals are made to external agencies to secure additional support for pupils with significant needs. Communication and contact with parents is also successful. Pupils benefit from additional adult support provided. However, the identification of pupils with SEND needs further attention. The system relies too heavily on staff raising concerns with the SENCo. Inspection evidence found that some pupils, who are clearly struggling in English and mathematics, have not been discussed with the SENCo, despite being in school for at least two years.

You and your governors have funded all children in the nursery to receive 30 hours provision, regardless if they are only eligible for 15 hours. As a result, a large number of children now attend nursery full time. This is helping children get off to a strong start at school. The early years curriculum ensures that activities cover all areas of learning. A topic approach is followed, and activities are linked to themes, such as 'Under the Sea'. However, leaders have not checked that the early years curriculum is an effective precursor to the Year 1 curriculum, or that it provides the foundations for a strong and well sequenced whole-school curriculum for all year groups.

Governors are very child-centred and care deeply about pupils' personal development. They maintained regular contact with you during the pandemic about how pupils and staff were coping. They meet monthly and ask leaders relevant questions about the agenda items. However, governors readily recognise that they

have focused on maintaining the school during the pandemic and school improvement and addressing the key issues set by Ofsted has been less of a priority. They have a new resolve and are determined to get back on track and to improve the curriculum so that pupils are not disadvantaged or held back in any subjects.

Additional support

You value the advisory support commissioned from external consultants by the local authority. You have made good use of the English adviser to monitor writing and provide training for staff. You and your staff respond positively to all support offered. However, contact with other schools and organisations has been limited. This means that no one has challenged your thinking or provided an opportunity to discuss and compare ideas and learn from good practice. Funding from the department for education has been secured to provide support from a national leader of education but this support is not yet operational.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, subject leaders, pupils, a representative from the local authority and those responsible for governance. You also accompanied me on a learning walk to most classes. I observed pupils reading to a member of staff, scrutinised documents and the school's website and considered the responses to Ofsted's parent and staff surveys.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector