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Dear Dr Carr

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodlands Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 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:

- ensure that staff have the necessary subject-specific knowledge to deliver the new curriculum effectively so that pupils gain long-term knowledge and skills in their learning.

Context

Since the previous inspection, 12 members of staff have left and five new members of staff have joined the school. A new deputy headteacher and a new early years leader have taken up their posts. Six governors have left the governing body and four new governors have been appointed. The position of chair of the governing body is now shared between two governors.

Main findings

At the last inspection, inspectors asked you and other leaders to improve pupils' knowledge and skills in a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics. Inspectors also asked leaders to improve the leadership of these subjects, to make the curriculum more ambitious and for it to build on pupils' prior learning.

Your detailed and evaluative development plans for the school accurately identify the key areas for improvement. You and other leaders are working to bring about effective change. This is contributing well to the improvements made to the curriculum. Curriculum plans in a range of subjects identify the key knowledge that you want pupils to know at the end of each topic and year group. This is aimed at helping pupils to build on what they already know as they move through school. However, in some subjects, work to develop the curriculum further has been delayed because of the restrictions caused by the pandemic. In these subjects, leaders have not been able to fully review the effectiveness of the recently implemented curriculum to check that pupils know and remember more.

One of the first improvements you undertook was developing the role of subject leaders. They are now playing a more influential role in developing the curriculum. You and other senior leaders have supported their development well. This has enabled them to understand the strengths and areas for development in their subjects. They evaluate the effectiveness of any initiatives precisely and accurately. This has made a positive contribution to the improvements in the curriculum, especially in English and mathematics.

Subject leaders receive training and opportunities to research their curriculum areas. This is helping to develop their confidence and skills. Their work to improve the quality of education pupils receive is bearing fruit. Within this improving curriculum, there are many opportunities for pupils to practise what they already know before they learn new things. For example, pupils told me that they use their knowledge of fractions to work out problems involving ratio in mathematics. That said, leaders are in the early stages of ensuring that all staff have the necessary subject knowledge to teach the more ambitious curriculum.

The reading curriculum has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils' progress in phonics is checked regularly and extra help is given to any pupils who need to catch up. Books that younger pupils read in school match the sounds that they are

learning. Pupils who receive extra support develop effective strategies to read words with increasing fluency. Pupils who spoke with me talked with excitement about the broad range of different authors and books available. They also discussed books which are read to them and books linked to different subjects, such as geography. These activities are helping to broaden pupils' subject knowledge.

In your work to improve the curriculum, you have paid close attention to the needs of all pupils. For example, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported to access the same curriculum as other pupils. Their needs have been also considered when designing the curriculum.

Governors meet regularly with subject leaders to discuss improvements in different subjects. This enables governors to offer effective support and challenge. Governors meet regularly with senior leaders to evaluate the progress of agreed actions, especially in regard to the quality of education. This supports governors in having a stronger understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement.

Staff feel valued and well supported by leaders. They particularly appreciate the consideration of their well-being by leaders. They also value the time given to check the effectiveness of new initiatives in improving the quality of education at the school.

Additional support

The local authority officer knows the school well. She acted quickly after the last inspection by providing training and arranging support, including for curriculum development. You and other leaders valued this support. You have used it well to improve the capacity of subject leaders and the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Evidence

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

I also reviewed the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan, minutes from meetings of the governing body, documents relating to the school's provision for pupils with SEND and the school's curriculum plans. I considered 137 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 48 responses to the staff survey form.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hunter
Her Majesty's Inspector