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13 September 2021

Maureen Duncan
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Duncan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Brook Special Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 July 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 received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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 subject plans for history and geography are refined further so that everyone is clear about what pupils need to know and do and in what order
- continue to invest in more reading books to enhance the school's phonics programme.

Context

There have been no changes to the senior leadership team since the previous inspection. The governing body has been restructured and is smaller than before. Governors now meet each month. One new governor has been appointed since the previous inspection.

Main findings

Leaders, including governors, were disappointed with the outcome of the previous inspection. Nevertheless, you used it as a turning point; a time to reflect and take stock of what needed to change. Pupils have been at the centre of all your decisions.

Over the past year, leaders have worked effectively to make some significant changes to what pupils learn.

Before the last inspection, teachers were using a variety of approaches to teach pupils to read. Things were disjointed and this was leading to a lack of consistency within the school. Leaders have improved this. They have established a single programme that is separated into different 'phases'. These phases take into account all stages of pupils' development. Importantly, your programme recognises that reading begins with pupils hearing, recognising and responding to sounds in their environment. The programme extends as pupils develop. It moves on to pupils building their phonics knowledge.

Some pupils are at the stage of using phonics to read words and sentences. Leaders make sure that these pupils use books that match the sounds they have learned. However, the variety of reading books available for pupils is, at times, limited.

You recognised that some staff did not have any experience in delivering phonics. Leaders have ensured that staff understand the new phonics programme. Staff know how each phase forms the building blocks for the next. The programme is well planned and organised. Leaders have established a sensible approach to checking pupils' reading, including phonics.

Following the previous inspection, leaders looked closely at what pupils were learning. You realised that although pupils were learning a broad range of subjects, things were not as connected as they needed to be. Some activities were not always part of a well-planned sequence of lessons. Staff focused well on pupils' individual targets and there was an emphasis on developing language and communication. But pupils' learning in the different subject areas was not as well thought out. You and your team are taking effective steps to tackle this issue.

Leaders know pupils incredibly well. They know that one size does not fit all. For example, a pupil might be able to access mathematics to a functional level but be at

a different level in their language and communication. To make sure that pupils learn the right things at the right times, leaders have developed different 'pathways'. Before, some pupils remained on one pathway for all their learning. This is no longer the case.

Within each subject, leaders have carefully considered what they want pupils to know and learn. It is clear to see how each pathway develops in each subject. Staff say that this system is much better. They have seen the difference it has made to individual pupils. They know where each lesson fits into the bigger picture. Staff pinpoint pupils' next steps in all areas of learning. That said, leaders need to refine further the subject plans for history and geography. This is because some of the more advanced learning goals are quite broad. This prevents everyone from being clear about exactly what pupils need to know and when.

Leaders have developed a system to check pupils' learning. Although it now needs time to embed, you have established a framework that captures pupils' achievements in each subject. It also takes into account the goals within pupils' education, health and care plans. Because this system goes hand in hand with the subject and pathway plans, it is very clear to see how it all fits together. This makes it easier for staff to measure pupils' achievements and plan for their next steps.

Staff are very positive about the changes leaders have made. They feel valued. This is because they have been fully involved in developing the curriculum for reading and other subjects. Leaders have invested in staff training and development. This is making a difference.

Governors have changed the way their meetings work. There are now fewer governors, but they meet more often. Each meeting looks closely at specific aspects of the school. Governors have supported leaders well. They have been mindful of leaders' and staff's well-being through what has been a challenging year for everyone. Governors understand the priorities for improvement. They know what still needs to be done to improve things further.

Additional support

Leaders have welcomed the support provided by an adviser from the Haringey Education Partnership. You and your team have used this support to guide school improvement planning and to evaluate your actions. Leaders used expertise from a different school to support their initial work to develop the phonics programme. Leaders used what they learned from this work to help them to deliver staff training throughout the school.

As part of your work to develop the school's subject plans and approach to reading, leaders have worked with other special schools. They have used these discussions to reflect on their practice.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the chair of governors and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I met with teachers and support staff. I visited all classes. I visited phonics and reading sessions. I reviewed subject plans and documentation related to curriculum and assessment procedures. I looked at the school development plan, self-evaluation documentation and records of governing body meetings. I reviewed responses to the staff survey and the free-text comments to Ofsted's Parent View survey.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Rawlings
Her Majesty's Inspector