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Paula Rudd
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Rudd

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Water Mill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 February 2022, 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 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing 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.

Context

Four new teachers have joined the school since the last inspection. You have reviewed and revised leaders' roles and responsibilities, including making changes to how subjects are led throughout the school.

The governing body has been significantly changed. There is a revised committee structure in place and almost all governors are new to the role.

You told me that you have not let the impact of COVID-19 get in the way of your plans to improve the school. You made adaptations to the curriculum to help pupils catch up in subjects where they had fallen behind and extra support remains in place for those pupils who need it.

Main findings

You and other senior leaders are taking the right action to improve the school. Your plans are ambitious and prioritise the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You took swift action to restructure the leadership team as soon as you became headteacher, just before the inspection. You have developed the senior and middle leadership teams so that they provide you with effective support to shape and implement the school's development plans.

You have maintained a rigorous focus on improving the quality of education pupils receive since the last inspection. Curriculum development has been at the centre of this work. There are detailed, well-sequenced plans in place for all subjects, which set out the key knowledge that pupils should acquire in each year group. The curriculum prioritises the subject-specific vocabulary that pupils need to understand to be successful. Pupils' workbooks show that they are gaining this knowledge and can apply it in their work. For example, Year 6 pupils' election manifestos, in the style of Winston Churchill, reflect their learning about the World War Two leader. Pupils in Year 3 are able to draw on their knowledge of the Stone Age when they produce a journal about 'My Stone Age Life'.

Subject leaders have developed plans that will meet the needs of all pupils. This includes those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the high proportion of new pupils whom you welcome into the school each term. Each subject has identified key concepts that are threaded through each topic that is covered. For example, in history, these include 'daily life' and 'legacy'. These concepts are regularly revisited so that pupils can build and deepen their knowledge. This helps to prepare pupils for the next steps in their learning.

The curriculum prioritises pupils gaining the knowledge they need to be successful in reading, writing and mathematics. You identified that many pupils had slipped behind with their learning in these areas when the school reopened fully in March 2021. You implemented a recovery programme and most pupils have caught up to where they should be in reading and mathematics. However, you have identified that pupils are not

doing as well in writing. Staff have had appropriate training and subject leaders have reviewed the opportunities that pupils have to write. Opportunities to write are now linked to what pupils are learning about in a range of subjects. Pupils' books show that most are beginning to write more confidently and competently. There is more to do to ensure that pupils are accurately applying what they have learned about grammar, punctuation and spelling.

You have strengthened the approach to teaching reading since the last inspection. Children begin learning to read as soon as they start in Reception. Phonics is taught daily by knowledgeable staff. Pupils' reading books are matched well to the sounds they know. However, this is not meeting the needs of the weakest readers well enough to enable them to catch up with their peers. You have already identified this and have firm plans in place to start work with an English Hub school this term. Teachers promote a love for reading. Older pupils say they enjoy the regular opportunities they have to listen to teachers reading to them and spending break and lunchtimes in the 'reading caravan', where they can choose from a wide range of books and 'really focus on reading'.

The school celebrates and rewards good attendance. You know that there are some pupils who do not attend school as well as they should, and you work hard with families to encourage them to send their children to school. You are robust in your approach and make formal referrals to the local authority when a pupil's attendance does not improve.

Governors are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities and are determined to improve the school. They have a thorough understanding of what is going well and what needs to get better. Governors provide appropriate levels of challenge and support to you and your leadership team.

Parents are positive about the improvements that you have made. Some told me that they have noticed that the work in their children's books is 'so much better' than it used to be, and others said that they were very happy with support for their children with SEND.

Additional support

You value the support that you receive from the school improvement partner provided by the local authority and from the external consultant that the school has commissioned. For example, this has helped you to provide bespoke support to subject leaders in the development of their plans and their ability to accurately monitor the quality of education in their subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and several subject leaders. I also met three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited some lessons, looked at pupils' workbooks and met with a group of pupils. I also observed pupils reading to an adult. I reviewed information on the school's website and a range of

documents provided by school leaders. I was able to speak to some parents at the end of the day to gather their views about the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Jo Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector