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Dear Mrs Owens

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Bakewell Methodist Junior School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 8 November 2022, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other leaders, the chair of the governing body, the local authority and a representative of the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also reviewed the school's self-evaluation document and leaders' school improvement plan. I scrutinised curriculum planning, visited lessons and looked at a wide sample of pupils' work across all year groups. I heard a selection of pupils read, and met with other pupils to listen to their experiences of their education and the things they had been taught. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Bakewell Methodist Junior School continues to require improvement. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that both senior and subject leaders monitor rigorously and systematically the impact of the recent curriculum to gain a precise knowledge about the strengths and any weaknesses in each subject, and can make any adjustments needed.

Main findings

Senior leaders have wasted no time in planning a more ambitious curriculum for pupils than what was in place at the time of the previous inspection. This is now in its second year of delivery of its two-year rolling programme. Thus, by the end of this academic year, it will have been delivered in its entirety. The revised curriculum makes clear the knowledge that pupils will learn at different stages.

Medium-term planning shows not only what pupils will learn at the end of each sequence, but also in each lesson. For instance, those in Years 3 and 4 begin geography work on climate change by learning the key features of the water cycle. Pupils' exercise books confirm that teachers are following these plans closely.

The knowledge that leaders want pupils to learn is intended to build as pupils become older. Pupils are taught things that are increasingly detailed. For example, in music, teachers teach younger pupils to sing a range of simple songs, such as 'Pease Pudding Hot', with contrasting pitch and style. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 go on to learn much more complex songs. Pupils progress from creating rhythmic phrases with a limited range to composing 8- and 16-beat phrases using the pentatonic scale. Teachers also teach each lesson in a logical order so that pupils learn more and more as they go.

To support this progress, curriculum planning links to things teachers have taught pupils already. When pupils study the Ancient Greeks, for instance, teachers remind them of what they have already learned about the culture and settlements of the Romans. This approach helps pupils to see connections. It supports them to understand ways in which things are both similar and different. It also helps pupils to remember more. This is strengthened by links made across subjects. Pupils construct a greetings card with levers in their design and technology work, using knowledge about forces acquired previously in science.

In addition, leaders' plans now make clear to teachers the vocabulary that they want pupils to know and use. For instance, in computing, pupils are being taught terms such as 'phishing', 'algorithm' and 'debug'. Again, this vocabulary becomes increasingly complex as pupils grow.

Teachers have put in place a clearer system to assure themselves that pupils are learning what they have planned for them. Typically, they make clear to pupils exactly what they must know at the end of each lesson, and check that they do. If pupils do not, they repeat it to remind them. The 'Golden Assessments' at the end of each sequence of lessons check that crucial content has been learned. Pupils in Years 3 and 4, for instance, write sentences to show this. In history, they write, 'Many Anglo-Saxon kings ruled during the time of the Vikings. Each king fought the Vikings from their land. In 1066 at the Battle of Hastings the Viking period ended.' Teachers also check that pupils remember enough over the longer term. At the start of the next topic, they assess what pupils know already before they introduce new things.

Leaders have already started closer monitoring of how well the new curriculum is working. In some subjects, they have a clear idea of its strengths and weaknesses, and which aspects need to be adjusted. However, in other subjects, this monitoring has been limited. As a result, leaders do not yet have a precise understanding of what different year groups can or cannot recall from previous units of learning. To address this, they have worked with external partners to introduce a new calendar of monitoring across the curriculum. Leaders are due to receive training on this imminently, before commencing it in full.

Senior leaders recognise how important it is that any pupils arriving at the school with weak reading skills catch up quickly. While teachers have been helping these pupils over the previous academic year, they have recently invested in a new phonics 'catch-up' scheme to quicken the pace of this. This programme has been deliberately chosen to align with the one with which pupils are familiar at the infant school they transfer from. Leaders know exactly what sounds each pupil does not know. Teachers are working systematically to teach these rapidly to individual pupils. They have been trained to do so. Leaders are clear that other than in exceptional circumstances, all pupils will complete this programme within their first term at the school and become fluent in all sounds. Because the programme is new, however, leaders know that they must monitor it to ensure that it delivers their high expectations for pupils. To strengthen pupils' wider reading skills, teachers are ensuring that they receive regular guidance in lessons. They teach reading each day in all classes, showing pupils how to, for example, explain and summarise. On 'Fluency Fridays', pupils perform extracts from texts and study the key features.

Leaders' work to improve the school has been enhanced by three factors. First, leaders are both ambitious and clear. They are determined to drive up standards so that all pupils are better prepared and ready to thrive at secondary school. To achieve this, they have written an action plan that is resulting in improving the aspects that need most attention. This plan is keeping leaders' attention focused on the curriculum and helping prevent undue distractions. The governing body, led by a skilled chair, is checking that actions are not delayed, and that these are having the intended impact.

Second, leaders have secured the support of staff. Those working at the school understand what is being done and why. They communicate well, cooperate closely and are united. Morale is high and staff are positive. They know they can do it.

Finally, leaders have welcomed the support of external agencies. For example, they have taken note of the advice of the local authority about the teaching of phonics. Leaders have paid heed to the results of visits by the local authority to explore the planning and delivery of reading. Leaders have also worked closely with the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust (MAST). Funding from this body has facilitated support from the Epworth Education Trust (EET). Leaders have accessed training from EET to both identify the features of an effective curriculum and to improve their own leadership skills. Most recently, they have worked with the trust to agree the calendar of curriculum monitoring. Leaders have gratefully accepted offers of further support from these agencies.

Nevertheless, they are mindful of the need for this to reduce over time as they themselves become more highly skilled and their capacity for independence grows.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for MAST, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
His Majesty's Inspector