

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



9 June 2021

Sarah Bridgman
Headteacher
Tonwell St Mary's Church of England Primary School
Ware Road
Tonwell
Ware
Hertfordshire
SG12 0HN

Dear Mrs Bridgman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Tonwell St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 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 teachers' planning, in all subjects, enables pupils to build up their knowledge and skills securely over time, so that they remember more of what they have learned as they respond to increasingly complex tasks.

Context

Since the previous inspection in January 2019, there have been some changes to leadership, governance and staff. You returned from planned leave in April 2019. Two governors left the governing body and four new governors were appointed. Two of the four teachers have left and since been replaced. The structure of mixed-age group classes has been reorganised.

Ofsted undertook an additional monitoring visit in March 2021. At the time of the visit, the inspector was of the view that leaders were providing an effective education during the pandemic. Teachers continue to offer remote learning for pupils who need to work from home because they are isolating.

Main findings

The previous full inspection in January 2019 highlighted weaknesses in leadership, including in governance and in the leadership of the quality of education across subjects. Expectations of what pupils could achieve were too low. Teachers' planning for effective learning in some subjects was underdeveloped.

Since the inspection, the work of the governing body has been strengthened through the recruitment of new and experienced governors. The members of the team of governors are regular visitors to the school so that they can monitor the development of important aspects of the school's work. Governors are starting to hold leaders to greater account for the quality of education that the school provides.

Working closely with subject leaders, you have redesigned the school's curriculum. Subject plans are in place that identify what pupils need to know and the order in which things need to be taught. Appropriate adaptations are made so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported to follow the same curriculum as other pupils.

However, subject planning is not consistently well developed in subjects beyond English and mathematics. Leaders have started to refine plans so that they are more precise. This is so they can be sure that new teaching builds on what pupils already know and to help them to make long-term connections with previous learning.

Training is in place to support subject leaders where they need more support to develop their subject knowledge. These leaders now have dedicated time to monitor

the quality of pupils' learning in their areas of responsibility, but this work is at an early stage.

You have prioritised the teaching of reading from early years through to the end of Year 6. In the early years, pupils now read books that match the letters and sounds they are learning in daily phonics lessons. Teaching assistants have had further training to help them to provide support for pupils who need to catch up. Occasionally, pupils' mistakes in sounding letters to read unfamiliar words are not corrected quickly, so they continue with the misconception.

The development of pupils' subject-specific vocabulary is a key focus of the school's curriculum improvement planning. Teachers make regular checks on how well pupils are doing with their reading, spelling and writing so that extra help can be offered if needed. Pupils enjoy reading and retelling the stories they have read. They read regularly to adults in school and they are encouraged to read regularly at home. You have invested in new library books and are continuing to extend the range of books available for pupils in school.

Additional support

Advisers from the local authority and the Diocese of St Albans meet regularly with leaders, including governors, to discuss leaders' actions and the impact on raising standards at the school. Advisers have also led training for subject leaders and teachers in English, mathematics, and in the early years curriculum. The local authority has facilitated opportunities to work with another local school to share good practice in teaching and learning. Collectively, this work has supported the improvements in the reading, writing and mathematics curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with senior leaders and teachers with subject leadership responsibilities. In online meetings, I also spoke with the school improvement partner, a representative of the Diocese of St Albans and six members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.

I looked at a range of documents, including the single central record of pre-employment checks on staff, policies, minutes from governor meetings and the school development plan. I also considered 15 free-text responses from parents, 17 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, and 11 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire for school staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils.

I visited lessons, together with the headteacher, taking account of the school's COVID 19 safety arrangements. I spoke with pupils separately about their learning and looked at the work in their books. I heard pupils read from Years 1, 3 and 5.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector