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Steph Tyler
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Dear Mrs Tyler

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Michael's Church of England Controlled Junior School

Following my remote inspection with Harry Ingham, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 10 and 11 February 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 provide education to all pupils during the current circumstances.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 (2) of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for visiting schools while routine inspections remain temporarily suspended. It was additional to the usual monitoring process for schools that are judged to require improvement.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, this monitoring inspection was carried out remotely. As such, the range of evidence available to inspectors was narrower than would normally be the case during an on-site inspection. As a result, this letter provides a more limited level of assurance than our usual monitoring reports.

The inspection took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in June 2019.

Having considered all the evidence and taking into account the impact of COVID-19 on the school, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils who are learning remotely get the extra help that they need, especially those learning phonics and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- improve provision for early reading by making sure that the books pupils use to practise reading are closely matched to the sounds they know and are working on.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, there has been a large turnover of staff. Three new year leaders have been appointed. Some members of the governing body are also new.
- During the autumn term, a quarter of pupils were educated remotely for short periods of time. No whole classes had to be sent home.
- At the time of the inspection, two thirds of pupils were being educated at home and one third were attending school. One third of pupils who are vulnerable and nearly half of those with SEND were attending on site. This includes three quarters of pupils with education, health and care plans.

Main findings

- Leaders and governors have ensured that pupils continue to receive education in the current circumstances. Leaders' determination to make sure that the curriculum is delivered effectively at home as well as on site has meant they have judiciously varied their approach, responding to what works best for pupils. For example, paper-based resources are provided for pupils at home who want them. Pupils' ability to access and submit work from home has been eased through the introduction of a new electronic system. This system has the potential to improve how adults at school interact with pupils at home.
- Since the previous inspection, subject leaders have revised the curriculum so that it better focuses on what pupils need to know by the time they leave the school. While this work is ongoing, plans are typically well thought through. This year, leaders have made useful additional changes to help pupils to catch up on missed learning, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Subject leaders and year leaders are knowledgeable and increasingly effective. They have had to adjust their monitoring of how well the curriculum is taught, but have still been able to spot potential issues as they arise. They have also supported teachers to adapt their teaching for pupils learning at home.

- Leaders' plans to improve the teaching of early reading had to be adapted because of the pandemic. In September, leaders ensured that staff training helped them to increase their knowledge of how to teach phonics and help pupils practise reading. Consequently, adults helped many pupils catch up with phonics and reading. However, since the new national lockdown in January, while those pupils furthest behind who are in school get extra help to practise with a trained adult, those at home do not. Rightly, leaders intend to use their remote learning system more interactively, so that pupils learning to read at home are better supported by adults in school.
- Books that older pupils read have been carefully selected to ensure that pupils are introduced to a range of genres, vocabulary and themes. The order that pupils study these in class has been adapted so that more complex texts will only be read when all pupils have returned to school. However, not enough attention has been paid to the books that the youngest pupils, and those furthest behind, use to practise reading. These books are not matched closely enough to the phonics sounds pupils are currently learning, which makes it harder for pupils to learn to read with comprehension and fluency.
- Since the last inspection, teachers' understanding of how to help pupils with SEND learn the curriculum has increased as a result of training provided by senior leaders. Specifically, this year the special educational needs coordinator has helped teachers to adapt work for those pupils with SEND who are learning at home. Pupils with SEND continue to get therapeutic support from outside agencies. However, pupils with SEND who currently learn at home do not get enough extra help with their learning.
- Governors have rightly checked that the school continues to provide pupils with an education in the current circumstances. They are in the early stages of implementing a new monitoring plan so that they can check the impact of leaders' work to improve the content and delivery of the whole-school curriculum. For example, they have checked that the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum meets requirements.
- The local authority has provided expert support which has helped leaders to improve the school's curriculum. In particular, leaders have used resources from the local authority to adapt English and mathematics to help pupils to catch up on lost learning. In addition, local authority training has helped middle leaders to develop strong leadership skills and supported governors in their strategic monitoring role.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, some middle leaders, a group of governors, a representative of the local authority and a representative from the Diocese of Guildford to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also spoke to a small group of pupils and viewed some pupils' work. We reviewed some of the leaders' curriculum planning and minutes of governance meetings. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 63 free-text responses, and 37 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector