

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



8 December 2020

Nicola Matheson
Headteacher
Sythwood Primary School
Sythwood
Woking
Surrey
GU21 3AX

Dear Mrs Matheson

Ofsted remote visit to Sythwood Primary School

Following my remote visit with Janet Pearce, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 19 November 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the visit's findings. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss your actions since September 2020, when the government expected all schools to open fully to all pupils.

This visit was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for visiting schools while routine inspections are temporarily suspended. Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the school.

Ofsted's visits to schools during the autumn term are not inspections. We are not giving graded judgements. We did not undertake the usual range of inspection activities and were unable to check other sources of evidence, such as visits to lessons or looking at pupils' work. The content of this letter gives an overview of our discussions about what has happened in your school this term.

During the visit, we spoke to you, members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, the school business manager and the executive leader for the Bourne Education Trust. We did not speak to pupils.

Context

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading

Ofsted's work into how England's education system is managing the return to full education for pupils, following an extended break in formal schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In undertaking this focused work, HMI are visiting a broad range of schools. HMI will visit a sample of:

- approximately 1,200 schools across all Ofsted grades (outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate)
- maintained schools, academies and free schools, special schools and centres of alternative provision, including those in cities, and coastal, town or rural communities.

The information from this visit will feed into Ofsted's national reporting so that the insights can be shared with the government and the education sector. We did not find any significant concerns during the visit. In such a case, an inspection report would be published on our website and available to parents and carers.

We did not consider your response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020, when the school was not open to all pupils.

From this visit, inspectors noted that:

- At the time of our remote visit, two Year 6 classes were self-isolating and working from home. Since September 2020, three fifths of pupils have had COVID-19-related absences.
- Pupils are studying their usual subjects apart from some aspects of music. For example, they are not currently studying singing. Leaders aim to return to the full curriculum by summer 2021.
- Teachers have assessed pupils' knowledge in English and mathematics. They are giving pupils additional support for spelling, grammar and handwriting. Teachers are also developing pupils' stamina to write at length across a range of subjects.
- Leaders have given prominence to the teaching of phonics. Teachers are providing extra phonics lessons to help younger pupils revise and practise trickier sounds. Leaders have used part of the COVID-19 catch-up premium to employ another phonics teacher. In Years 3 to 6, teachers are focusing on developing pupils' comprehension skills.
- In mathematics, teachers are pleased to note that pupils have remembered their quick recall of number facts and times tables. They have identified that pupils need to improve their reasoning and problem-solving skills in all year groups. Teachers have adapted their planning so that pupils can practise these aspects.

- Across the school, teachers have found that some pupils have more difficulty with explaining their ideas since returning to school. They are providing pupils with opportunities to use and apply specialist vocabulary in subjects such as geography, history and science.
- Teachers are providing remote education for pupils who are self-isolating. This covers the subjects other pupils are learning in school. When a 'bubble' needs to self-isolate, teachers provide live lessons via the school's online system. This is in place for those pupils in Year 6 who are currently working from home.

Thank you again for contributing to this important national work. The views and experiences you have shared will help to inform future policy.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Bourne Education Trust academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Surrey. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Shazia Akram
Her Majesty's Inspector