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12 February 2021

Mr Rob Meech
Executive Headteacher
St John's Catholic Primary School
Melbourne Street
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Dear Mr Meech

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Matt Middlemore, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 27 and 28 January 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.

Context

- Since the last inspection, there has been some turbulence in leadership and staffing. The headteacher retired in December 2020. You joined the school as executive headteacher in January 2021. The mathematics leader was appointed as assistant headteacher in January 2021. The English leader was appointed as the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) in January 2021. You have also appointed new leaders for science and Spanish.
- In the autumn term 2020, a very small proportion of pupils in different year groups experienced periods of remote education due to COVID-19.
- At the time of this inspection, 63% of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are attending school. Nearly all vulnerable pupils attend regularly. Around 37% of all pupils are currently being educated remotely.
- No members of staff are currently absent due to COVID-19. Typically, leaders have not been faced with any significant staffing challenges.

Main findings

- When schools partially closed on 23 March 2020, the previous headteacher and her leadership team were in the process of revising the curriculum. You and your leadership team have continued to develop the curriculum so that it can be taught both remotely and in school. Through careful planning and provision of resources, you have ensured that pupils are appropriately provided with education regardless of how they access it.
- The majority of vulnerable and key worker children are attending school. You and your staff continue to adapt the curriculum so that pupils are engaged and make progress in their learning. Staff provide frequent feedback to pupils, both remotely and on site, to ensure that pupils are secure in their understanding before moving onto the next topic.
- The majority of pupils with SEND are currently attending school. You have adapted the curriculum to improve pupils' access to learning and to meet the social and emotional needs of pupils. For example, some pupils continue to access play therapy and teaching staff ensure that all pupils study the personal, social, health and economic curriculum.
- You continue to develop the phonics programme. It is well structured and sequenced, enabling pupils in key stage 1 and children in the early years to make links between letters and sounds. You are providing parents and carers with appropriate resources to support pupils with their early reading, whether remotely or in school.

- The development of a new reading curriculum is helping pupils to extend their understanding and knowledge of a range of texts. Pupils in all year groups listen daily to a range of texts. Pupils talk proudly about their enjoyment of reading and developing confidence in understanding different texts. To improve writing, your curriculum development is focused on the necessary vocabulary, grammar and punctuation that pupils require to write for different purposes, audiences and text types.
- Leaders have revised the mathematics curriculum. Leaders acknowledge that the curriculum requires further adaptation to ensure that pupils are secure in their knowledge and skills before moving on to new topics. For example, leaders are currently reviewing the curriculum to ensure that pupils develop strong problem-solving and reasoning skills.
- There have been some changes in subject leadership since the last inspection which in turn has delayed the development of the curriculum in some subjects, notably Spanish and science. You plan to accelerate the revisions to the content and assessment methods in these subjects so that pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Governors are checking the actions taken by leaders to assure themselves that all pupils receive an appropriate education in the current circumstances. They are working well with you and your team to review the remote education offer alongside that provided in school.
- The trust continues to provide support in curriculum leadership, design and assessment. Despite changes to the school's leadership, this support has remained constant. More recently, the trust has introduced training to develop pupils' learning and more effective school to school support. However, these approaches are relatively recent and it is too early to judge their impact.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with the executive headteacher, assistant headteacher, SENCo, several curriculum leaders, Plymouth CAST education standards manager and the director of education and the chair of governors to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown. We also spoke to three members of staff and ten pupils. An inspector heard five pupils read. We also reviewed the remote education offer.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer or equivalent of Plymouth CAST, the director of education for the Diocese of Plymouth, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin
Her Majesty's Inspector