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Paul Bacon
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Dear Mr Bacon

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

Following my remote inspection with Tracey Reynolds, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 3 and 4 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 special measures.

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 was judged to require special measures at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in July 2018.

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:

- develop the wider curriculum to make it clear what pupils should know and by when, so that pupils can build up their knowledge and skills incrementally. Leaders need to ensure that curriculum plans show how specific skills and bodies of knowledge fit together over time so that pupils learn and remember more as a result.

Context

- Since the monitoring inspection in April 2019, the interim executive board has been replaced by a local governing body. An interim headteacher left the school in the summer term 2019. The current headteacher was appointed in an interim capacity in September 2019. The senior leadership has been reformed and a new early years leader has been appointed.
- In the autumn term 2020, very few pupils needed to work from home due to COVID-19. There were no classes or 'bubbles' that needed to isolate during this time.
- At the time of this inspection, approximately 35% of pupils are being educated on site. The majority of vulnerable pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are attending school.
- At the time of this inspection, leaders are not dealing with any significant staffing issues or absences due to COVID-19.

Main findings

- Governors and leaders are working hard alongside staff to drive improvements to the school in the current circumstances. Senior leaders have raised staff morale and fostered a sense of collective purpose. This work to raise morale has proved its worth in helping staff meet the challenges of providing education during the pandemic. Staff say that they trust leaders to make the right decisions. Moreover, staff feel that their contributions are valued.
- Prior to the partial closure of the school in March 2020, leaders had been working with local authority advisers to develop teachers' confidence and expertise, particularly in the teaching of early reading and mathematics. When pupils returned in the autumn term 2020, this rightly continued as an integral part of a 'recovery curriculum' which also focused on supporting pupils' mental well-being.
- Leaders have made great strides to improve the quality of mathematics education and the school's approach to the teaching of reading. They have begun to develop the science curriculum. However, work in the other subjects that form the national curriculum is at a very early stage. Some subject

leaders do not have the knowledge they need to develop curriculum plans with confidence. Teachers are not always clear where there are gaps in pupils' knowledge. Therefore, curriculum plans are not adjusted so that pupils can consolidate the essential subject content that they need.

- Leaders are prioritising and promoting an enjoyment of reading. There is a consistent approach to the way in which early reading is taught. Younger pupils who are currently working from home use online resources and attend 'live' sessions to learn and practise their phonics. Pupils read books that are well matched to their level of phonic understanding. Pupils who have fallen behind in reading receive extra support to help them to catch up with their peers.
- Since March 2020, leaders have refined the school's approach to delivering education so that pupils, including vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers, can follow the school's curriculum whether they are learning at home or at school. Leaders check regularly that pupils are taking part in lessons when learning at home. They have adapted the ways in which pupils can share what they have learned and how teachers can check pupils' understanding.
- Leaders have encouraged vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers to attend school during the current restrictions. Where this is not the case, staff are in regular contact with pupils.
- Leaders have a secure understanding of the needs of pupils with SEND and support is tailored well to their needs. Leaders have maintained links with specialist staff and external agencies throughout this period.
- Governors are supportive of school leaders and receive regular information about the actions that leaders are taking. Governors continue to meet using video conferencing, both as a group and with school leaders. Governors are ambitious for the school and its future. However, they do not ask sharp enough questions about why leaders have made the decisions they have about what pupils learn and, crucially, the difference this is making.
- Local authority advisers have worked closely with the school since the previous inspection. This support has been well matched to the school's initial priorities and includes the development of the early years provision. The work completed to date has provided a foundation from which leaders can build as they embark on the next phase of improvement.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, staff and pupils. We also met with representatives from the local governing body, the diocese and the local authority. In these

meetings we discussed leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

Inspectors also reviewed school policies and other documentation. We looked at pupils' work and sampled some teaching sessions which had been recorded. Inspectors took parents' views into account through responses to Parent View.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis
Her Majesty's Inspector