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Heather Brand
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Brand

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Ditchingham Church of England Primary Academy

Following my remote inspection with Tessa Holledge, 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 at its previous section 5 inspections. The school was last inspected in February 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 teachers have the knowledge and understanding they need to support pupils with SEND effectively.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, there has been a new chair of the governing body, and a new chief executive of the trust has been appointed.
- Approximately one sixth of pupils had to be educated remotely during the autumn term 2020 because of COVID-19.
- At the time of this inspection, the school was only open to vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers. Approximately two thirds of pupils are being educated at home. Some pupils of key workers access both on-site provision and remote learning. All the school's most vulnerable pupils are being educated on site. A small proportion of pupils with SEND are currently attending on site.

Main findings

- You are taking the necessary actions to provide education to pupils in the current circumstances. You are finding ways to support pupils to learn effectively at home. This includes providing extra resources where they are needed, as well as devices for pupils to access learning online.
- Pupils attending school on site follow the same curriculum subject content as those who are learning at home. Leaders are confident that pupils' engagement is high. Teachers provide feedback on the work pupils are doing remotely. Teachers have regular contact with pupils and are currently planning targeted support for those who are struggling. This support is at an early stage of development. Teachers are reviewing this regularly to help pupils catch up.
- Younger pupils continue to have daily input in phonics. You have recently introduced a new programme for teaching phonics and reading in early years and key stage 1. Teachers are giving additional thought to how they check the progress pupils are making in phonics and reading when they are learning remotely. This is so the appropriate support can be put in place to help weaker readers catch up.
- Leaders are continuing to promote an enjoyment of reading. Key stage 2 pupils can use the school's virtual library. Teachers have devised online reading activities so that pupils continue to develop their reading skills while they are learning remotely. Although pupils miss the opportunity to discuss texts in detail with their teachers and their peers, pupils enjoy sharing their experiences of reading with each other through the virtual library.

- In March 2020, curriculum plans were in place for English and mathematics throughout the school. During the summer term, leaders reviewed the curriculum for all other subjects. Teachers have been using these plans since September 2020 and are adapting them for the remote education that pupils receive. In some subjects, there are aspects, such as practical work in science and music, that teachers are delaying until pupils can work together more easily and until they have the resources they need.
- Teachers have not received the guidance and training they need to adapt plans and lessons to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Pupils with SEND continue to receive additional support from external agencies.
- Governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are diligent in their work. Governors provide appropriate challenge and support to ensure that leaders remain focused on the work they need to do to continue to improve the school and provide effective education in the current circumstances.
- The trust has increased its level of support for the school because of the current circumstances. In addition to regular school improvement visits, the trust is providing additional guidance and support for governance. They also provide support to promote the well-being of staff and pupils. Staff and governors value the support they are receiving and appreciate the opportunity to work together to share good practice.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with the executive headteacher and the head of school. We also held meetings with representatives of the trust, including the chief executive officer, the improvement director, the executive principal, the chair of the governing body and the governance improvement associate. We also met with two groups of pupils and with teaching staff. We looked at documentation provided by the school, including on the school website.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Diocese of Norwich Education Academies Trust (DNEAT), the director of education for the Diocese of Norwich, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Katherine Douglas
Her Majesty's Inspector