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Peter Hilton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hilton

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Millbrook Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Isabel Davis, 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 March 2020.

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 effective implementation of the reading curriculum enables pupils to gain the phonic knowledge they need to read well
- ensure that the planned curriculum meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Context

- Since the previous inspection, there has been significant staff turnover. Leaders have undertaken a restructure of the workforce. Since the autumn term 2020, there has been some further staffing turbulence. As a result, you are currently employing two supply teachers and have recently appointed a new teacher. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) joined the staff team in January 2021.
- There have been changes to the governing body. This has resulted in a new chair and vice-chair starting in April 2020.
- During the autumn term 2020, all pupils experienced remote education. A significant number of senior staff became ill with COVID-19, leading to the closure of the school for a period of one week.
- At the time of this inspection, 70% of pupils are being educated at home. Around 54% of vulnerable pupils and 75% of pupils with SEND are accessing lessons every day in the school.

Main findings

- Working alongside leaders, you have made it a priority to ensure that pupils continue to receive an education during the current national lockdown. Extra resources, such as electronic devices and learning aides, are made available to those working at home. This means that these pupils are able to successfully participate in remote learning. The steps your leadership team have taken mean that education is provided for pupils.
- Since you took up your post as headteacher in April 2019, you have focused on developing the school's plans for the curriculum. Leaders have ensured that for each subject, plans identify the key things pupils need to know and by when. Your leaders are refining their subject plans. This is to help teachers understand whether pupils have any gaps in their learning over this period. Additional work is being done to pick out the most important things pupils must know.
- A range of subjects are being taught at this time. This is the same offer for pupils working at home or attending school. Teachers are giving greater focus

to reading, writing and mathematics. This is to ensure that pupils receive the core knowledge and skills in these curriculum areas.

- The school has continued to experience significant changes in staffing. Many leaders are new to their roles. School partial closures, owing to COVID-19, have delayed their development as you had planned. You know what needs to be done. Use has been made of external advisers to support new leaders to develop their leadership skills.
- Teachers provide a range of online resources to help children and pupils with their phonics work at home. However, leaders have not checked the quality of remote phonics teaching during this current period of national lockdown and there are some weaknesses in the delivery of this curriculum. For example, in key stage 1, there are no daily remote phonic lessons, as per leaders' plans for phonics. This is reducing the opportunities available for pupils at home to practise the sounds that they need to learn to read well.
- Reading books are available either digitally or can be collected from the school. However, for those pupils who are attending school, books are not matched well to the sounds that pupils are learning.
- Leaders are working effectively to identify and help the most vulnerable pupils, especially to support pupils' welfare and well-being. Pupils who attend school work in small groups. They access more individual support and adult help with their learning. Pupils at home receive regular contact from school staff. This helps leaders to identify how they can support pupils' social and emotional needs during this period.
- There have been many changes in the leadership of the SEND provision. The new SENCo has made a start in checking the support provided for pupils with SEND. Interventions are monitored and adapted to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. However, leaders have not yet checked that curriculum plans and teaching meet the needs of pupils with SEND.
- Since the previous inspection, governors have taken on different roles. Governors continue to check the education pupils are receiving during this time. They ask questions to help identify any problems leaders are experiencing in delivering remote education. Governors work with you to seek solutions. They recognise that this is a challenging time for all the staff. Governors make regular contact with leaders to ensure that staff well-being and workload are managed well.
- You have continued to receive support from local authority advisers. They help leaders to develop and monitor the implementation of your curriculum plans. Working alongside advisers is helping new leaders to strengthen their skills of leadership. Governors who have taken on new roles are accessing training from the local authority's governor services. They receive reports

from the school's improvement partner. Governors use the information to challenge leaders' decisions about their improvement plans.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance, and a representative of the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also scrutinised curriculum plans, examples of pupils' work, the school website, online teaching resources and remote education. We took account of 24 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 37 free-text responses and 14 responses to the Ofsted staff survey. Additionally, we heard pupils read to school staff and spoke to two groups of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector