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3 March 2021

Victoria Carr
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Dear Dr Carr

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Woodlands Primary School

Following my remote inspection with John Tomlinson, 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 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 April 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 staff have the necessary subject-specific knowledge that they need to deliver the new and more ambitious curriculum
- strengthen the links between the early years curriculum and the curriculum across the rest of the school. This is to enable subject leaders to take greater account of the building blocks that should be in place by the time pupils enter Year 1.

Context

- Since the inspection in April 2019, 12 members of staff have left, and five new members of staff have joined the school. A new deputy headteacher and a new early years leader have taken up their posts. Six governors have left the governing body and four new governors have been appointed.
- During the autumn term 2020, approximately one in every eight pupils spent some time working at home.
- At the time of this inspection, roughly one fifth of the school population were being educated on the school's site. This includes just over half of those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and half of those pupils who have been identified as vulnerable.
- Currently, a small proportion of staff are absent due to COVID-19. Other staff are being redeployed to cover these absences so that pupils' learning is not affected.

Main findings

- You, other leaders and teachers have spent your time and energy wisely since the previous inspection. Your careful consideration of what pupils should learn means that you have established a well-planned and structured curriculum. This has stood everyone in good stead for the current testing times. You have deftly overcome the challenges caused by the third national lockdown. As a result, all pupils continue to enjoy a relevant and purposeful education, whether they learn in school or at home.
- In September 2020, you forged ahead with the implementation of the new curriculum. However, your plans to elevate teachers' subject knowledge in order to teach the more ambitious curriculum content did not happen. Due to the pandemic, teachers' training took a different tack. This has paid dividends for the current situation. All staff and pupils are well versed in the systems for remote education. This means that pupils have not lost learning time.
- Pupils continue to study the same range of subjects that they would in usual circumstances. This is the case whether pupils learn at school or at home.

Pupils are mostly following their typical curriculum in English and mathematics. This is not so for some other subjects that require specialist resources, such as art and science. Subject leaders have adapted the curriculum appropriately, moving topics around to ensure that pupils continue to learn.

- Teachers in the early years have made sensible decisions about the learning offer to the youngest children. Even so, staff are aware that, undoubtedly, these children will return to school with gaps in their knowledge. Recent improvements to the curriculum have not linked closely enough with children's learning in the early years. Some subject leaders have not considered the building blocks that should be in place by the time children enter Year 1.
- The teaching of phonics, highlighted as a strength in the previous inspection report, continues to be effective. Well-trained staff deliver daily phonics sessions that cater for pupils' different stages of development. Staff check on pupils' gains in their phonics knowledge regularly and adapt their teaching accordingly. Those pupils who find reading more difficult receive the same support as they did prior to the pandemic. Older pupils have access to a range of online books to maintain their fluency and passion for reading.
- Pupils with SEND, and those pupils that are more vulnerable, receive the same education offer as other pupils in the school. Teachers and teaching assistants work in partnership to adapt learning carefully. This is especially true for those pupils with the greatest learning needs. You have been particularly successful in ensuring that pupils with SEND continue to benefit from the same level of support that they usually receive. Leaders have maintained links with external agencies to secure the additional help that individual pupils need. Staff keep an extra vigilant eye on the well-being of these pupils, especially if they are not being educated in school.
- Governors' work has not been hampered by the national lockdown restrictions. They are well informed about the current situation in school. Their challenge to you, and to other leaders, includes their own review of the education offer that pupils are receiving. Governors have worked with you to ensure that all pupils have access to electronic devices. This is to make sure that pupils are not left behind when they are not attending school.
- Support from the local authority has made a positive difference. The leader for mathematics has refined the curriculum with the support of a specialist leader in education. Additional funding from the local authority has enabled you to enhance the current approach to phonics teaching. The local authority adviser has been close at hand during the recent challenging months. She has kept a check on staff's well-being and offered support with your remote education offer.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with you, subject leaders, the leader responsible for special educational needs, two members of staff from the school's pastoral team, a local authority officer and six members of the governing body to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also spoke with teachers, teaching assistants and two groups of pupils who are being educated in school. We evaluated a range of documentation, including curriculum plans and teaching resources. We also sampled the work completed by pupils since the third lockdown came into force. We observed pupils reading to a trusted adult. We considered the responses of 66 staff to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. We reviewed the 113 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including the 97 free-text responses.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector