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Deborah Fance
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Dear Ms Fance

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Heath Mount Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Eve Morris, 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 three 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 previous inspection, there have been some staff changes. Three teachers have left. One new teacher has been appointed and some temporary staff have been employed. The assistant headteacher has been appointed as the permanent deputy headteacher. A new governing body is in place.
- During autumn 2020, about two thirds of pupils received remote education at some point in the term. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 were affected by this more than others.
- At the time of this inspection, just over a tenth of pupils were being educated in school. Two thirds of pupils identified as being vulnerable and half of pupils with education, health and care plans were attending school.
- At the time of this inspection, three staff were absent from work due to COVID-19.

Main findings

- Before the pandemic, leaders had revised curriculum plans so that the sequence of pupils' learning was mapped out in more detail. These improvements span most subjects with some, such as English and mathematics, being further ahead than others. Leadership had improved and was focusing on strengthening pupils' learning in key stage 1, which remains a current priority.
- These improvements meant the school was better placed to manage the disruption caused by the pandemic. A structured approach to curriculum planning has helped staff to plan meaningful remote education. Currently, whether at home or in school, pupils are studying all their usual subjects. In many cases, teachers follow existing curriculum plans. In English and mathematics, pupils are still following work in the same order as they would in school. That said, more time is given to practice and consolidation to reduce the risk of anyone falling behind. In science, some content has been reordered to make activities more manageable at home. In music and physical education, lessons are very different from usual. In both subjects, leaders have created new activities to keep pupils interested and engaged.
- The school's remote education offer includes a mix of live lessons and other activities. Not all activities take place on computers and pupils are still required to write using pen and paper, so they do not get out of practice. Older pupils attend live online lessons at different times to younger pupils so families can share devices at home. Leaders have worked hard to improve home access to appropriate internet devices. Through their links with charities and other organisations, they have sourced many laptops for pupils who need them.

- Leaders monitor attendance at online lessons. If a pupil does not attend or leaves a lesson early, then staff telephone home to find out why. When necessary, pupils who find it hard to learn at home are asked to come into school. Staff keep in contact with professional services, such as social services, as part of their checks on pupils' welfare and whereabouts.
- The school's online platform allows teachers to create small group sessions during lessons. Pupils who have special educational needs, or who need extra guidance, benefit from this. Regular contact with pupils and their families helps to keep extra support targeted at the right things.
- A large proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. Because of this, online lessons include many visual resources and carefully chosen language so pupils can understand. School leaders regularly watch online lessons and talk with staff to find out what is working well and what could be improved. Pupils who have very little knowledge of English are continuing to attend school so they can interact and speak with others face to face.
- The school has a structured phonics programme and daily routines for teaching reading. Pupils get plenty of practice and are expected to read regularly. Staff have made eBooks available to pupils at home and provide phonically decodable texts. Teachers organise competitions and rewards to recognise effort and spur pupils on. The leadership of reading is informed and realistic.
- Governors have a clear understanding of their role. They have made informed decisions about spending on resources to support remote learning. They are suitably informed about the school's current curriculum offer and have not lost sight of long-term improvement goals.
- Parents express positive views about the school's work and arrangements for remote education. Most respondents to Ofsted Parent View report that the school is improving. Staff, too, think that the school has improved.
- External support, brokered through the local authority, is helping the school to move forwards. The school's improvement partner reports that the school is prioritising the right things at this time. Inspection evidence supports this view. The consistent approach to remote education indicates that leaders are making progress in developing more joined-up thinking across the whole school.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, teaching staff, pupils, the chair and vice-chair of governors and a school improvement partner to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also looked at curriculum plans, remote education resources and information on the school's website. We observed a reading session and looked at pupils' work. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 40 free-text responses, and 32 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector