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Sean Kavanagh
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Dear Mr Kavanagh

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Broom Cottages Primary and Nursery School

Following my remote inspection with Jenny Thomas, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 23 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 October 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:

- ensure struggling readers, who are learning at home, receive appropriate support from adults in school
- address weaknesses that they have identified swiftly and decisively, with a much stronger sense of urgency.

Context

- Following the retirement of the early years leader, two teachers took over this role as a job-share partnership in January 2020.
- During the autumn term 2020, pupils in Years 1 to 4 had to learn from home for at least two weeks. Pupils in Year 2 learned from home for four weeks.
- The Nursery Year is open now and almost all children are attending. In the rest of the school, a quarter of pupils are being educated in school.
- More than a quarter of vulnerable pupils are learning at school. However, more than half of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are still learning from home.
- At the time of this inspection, five staff were absent due to COVID-19. The headteacher is leading the school remotely. The deputy headteacher is leading day-to-day on site.

Main findings

- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum meets the needs of most pupils. However, leaders have identified that some pupils are not engaging with learning at home. School and local authority staff visit pupils' homes to ask parents how they can support families. They encourage pupils to join in with learning.
- At the outset, senior leaders decided that lessons would be pre-recorded for pupils to access remotely. In January 2021, the local authority challenged the lack of face-to-face interaction between teachers and pupils. Recently, leaders have taken advice and considered a range of options. However, leaders have not taken decisive action to address the issue.
- Middle leaders have successfully adapted their curriculum plans. For example, in design and technology, pupils are able to design, make and evaluate remotely. Teachers have thought more carefully about the materials likely to be readily available in family homes. Pupils can also collect resources from school if they need them.
- Pupils record and upload their science experiments, and teachers view these and give feedback. Pupils say that this happens quickly. This is working well for those remote learners who are taking part.

- Leaders ensure that a daily phonics lesson is available for all pupils. Recorded lessons are provided remotely. Teaching assistants work with individual pupils in school to give them the extra help they need. This help is not available to pupils who are learning to read at home. Teachers have telephone contact with parents, but this is not good enough for those pupils who are struggling to learn to read. Leaders should ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to access the extra help they need.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has maintained contact with other professionals who give specialist advice for pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). In addition, the speech and language therapist completes face-to-face assessments remotely and discharges pupils with a personalised programme. Leaders are relying wholly on parents to deliver these programmes at home. For the few parents who are not engaging, this puts these pupils at a disadvantage by comparison with their peers whose learning is supported at school. For this reason, the SENCo has recently offered more pupils with SEND a place in school.
- Governors have increased their attendance at governor training since this has been offered remotely. There is evidence in the minutes of governing body meetings that governors are getting better at challenging school leaders. For example, governors are evaluating the curriculum and pupils' engagement at their meetings. They challenged leaders when they noticed that only three Year 4 pupils out of 26 had uploaded their work. Governors asked what leaders were doing to improve pupils' engagement in learning. When leaders reported the limitations of their remote learning arrangements, and the impact on pupils' engagement, governors did not ensure that leaders acted urgently to improve this.
- In January 2021, the local authority challenged leaders about their remote learning offer and urged them to take swift action. The local authority recommended a national leader of education to support leaders with this. The local authority has provided effective challenge and support.
- The SENCo values the training and support provided by the local authority's inclusion team. There is a local 'community of learning', where best practice is shared, and regular SENCo network meetings have continued. A range of professionals offer advice and guidance. These include the autism team, the educational psychologist, teachers who support deaf pupils, and services that support pupils' mental health and emotional well-being. The impact of professionals' increased availability since January 2021 means that reports, assessments and therapeutic guidance come through straight away. This helps the SENCo to provide additional resources quickly for pupils with SEND.

Evidence

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

We also reviewed a pre-recorded science lesson, scrutinised examples of pupils' work, observed pupils read to their teacher and evaluated documentation. This documentation included local authority records of visits and the minutes of meetings of the governing body. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 13 free-text responses, and 21 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 Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tracey Ralph
Her Majesty's Inspector