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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Nichola Smith
Executive Headteacher
St Helen's Primary Academy
St Helen's Way
Monk Bretton
Barnsley
S71 2PS

Dear Mrs Smith

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Helen's Primary Academy

Following my remote inspection with Jenny Thomas, 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.

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 four successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in January 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 all curriculum plans precisely set out what pupils should know, and in what order, from the early years to Year 6
- develop the confidence and expertise of curriculum leaders so that they become less reliant on support from the multi-academy trust to fulfil their roles.

Context

- Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes to staffing and governance. The executive headteacher, the head of school and the chair of governors were appointed in September 2020. Other key leaders were appointed at the same time, including the attendance leader and the special educational needs coordinator. Approximately half of the teachers are new to the school.
- Across the autumn term 2020, year group 'bubbles' in the early years, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 had to be educated remotely. The Year 5 'bubble' closed twice during that period.
- Currently, half of pupils are being educated on site and half at home. The majority of vulnerable pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are attending on site.
- Presently, a small number of staff are absent long term. Leaders are covering their absence by means of temporary staff appointments.

Main findings

- Senior leaders, including those responsible for governance, have ensured that all pupils can access education at this time. Leaders have provided electronic devices to pupils who require them. Staff carry out daily checks to make sure as many pupils as possible participate in lessons and complete the set activities. Teachers offer prompt support to any who are struggling to learn.
- Leaders and staff have adapted the curriculum to current challenges. Pupils who are learning at home follow the same curriculum as those on site, with some adaptations. For example, in physical education, teachers now combine fitness activities with learning about nutrition and healthy lifestyles.
- Before schools partially closed in March 2020, leaders were in the early stages of reviewing the curriculum. The new leadership team is continuing this work, which has been slowed by the impact of COVID-19. Curriculum planning is inconsistent. In some subjects, plans do not include consideration of the early years. Plans in some subjects are too general and do not set out in enough detail what pupils should know, and when.

- Currently, some areas of the curriculum are led by central staff from the multi-academy trust. Some school staff lack the confidence and experience to fully embrace their roles as subject leaders. Leaders are addressing this through training and support. However, this is hindered by high staff turnover.
- Leaders and staff prioritise education on site for vulnerable pupils and children of key workers. Staff are alert to any other pupils who would benefit from attending on site, through the 'every child check-in' contact system. The majority of pupils with SEND attend on site. Staff ensure that pupils with SEND receive daily teaching of reading and personalised support appropriate to their needs.
- Teachers provide daily phonics lessons for pupils, in all year groups, who are in the early stages of learning to read. Staff also offer resources to parents who are supporting their children to read at home. Pupils read from books that are carefully matched to their phonics knowledge.
- Governors support leaders in providing education for all pupils at this time. They question leaders to assure themselves that pupils with SEND and vulnerable pupils receive appropriate teaching and support. Governors continue to fulfil their statutory duty in relation to safeguarding.
- Leaders and governors keep a close check on staff well-being and workload through informal chats and a weekly survey. Staff say that they feel 'valued and appreciated' at this time.
- The multi-academy trust has substantial involvement with the school. This is beginning to have a positive impact on curriculum development and leadership. School leaders benefit from access to trust-wide systems and policies which enable them to provide remote education for pupils who are learning at home.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, representatives from the multi-academy trust, pupils, staff and the chair of the local governing body to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also reviewed minutes of governing body meetings and curriculum plans. We observed pupils in school reading to a member of staff. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including seven free-text responses, and 19 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Academies Enterprise Trust multi-

academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Watkins
Her Majesty's Inspector