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Kyra Siddall-Ward
Interim Executive Headteacher
Stafford Junior School
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Dear Mrs Siddall-Ward

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Stafford Junior School

Following my remote inspection with Clive Close, 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 special measures.

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 was judged to require special measures. 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 (coronavirus) 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:

- firmly establish a coherent approach to teaching the full curriculum
- further develop the support available for pupils who are not yet fluent in reading so that they catch up quickly.

Context

- Since the last inspection in January 2020, there have been changes to leadership and governance. An interim executive headteacher, a head of school and an assistant head with responsibility for inclusion have been appointed. An interim executive board was formed in March 2020. The school is planning to join a multi-academy trust in September 2021.
- During the autumn term 2020, there was a fire at the school. 38% of pupils were educated on site at five local schools for approximately three weeks. The rest of the pupils had to work from home for this period. A small proportion of pupils worked from home before and after the fire due to COVID-19.
- At the time of this inspection, 34% of pupils were being educated on site. Of these pupils attending on site, 21% were vulnerable pupils and 20% were pupils who have an educational, health and care plan and special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- At the time of this inspection, approximately 10% of staff were currently off work due to COVID-19. A further 10% of staff were on a phased return to work due to COVID-19. Leaders are employing staff from an agency to cover these positions.

Main findings

- You show admirable determination to improve the school, despite the challenges over the last year. Together with the interim executive board, you and your newly formed leadership team are ensuring that all pupils, including those working at home, are receiving an education under the current circumstances. Leaders have modified the school's remote learning offer over time in consultation with parents and staff. A significant proportion of this provision is focused on pupils' well-being. Most remote education is provided online, using a combination of live and pre-recorded activities. Leaders have supported pupils well to develop their computing skills so they can access learning in this way.
- Leaders introduced a new curriculum in September 2020. This is helping teachers identify the important knowledge pupils need to learn and the order in which it should be taught. You prioritised training for staff to make sure they had the required subject knowledge to deliver the new planning. However, progress in this area of the school's work has been hampered by the fire at the school as well as high levels of staff absence due to COVID-19.

- Leaders have made changes to planning in foundation subjects to accommodate the current circumstances. For example, at present, pupils are not being taught modern foreign languages or aspects of geography or history. Leaders have plans to return to the full curriculum in the foundation subjects as soon as all pupils return to school.
- In September 2020, leaders implemented a phonics programme to support the systematic teaching of reading. All staff were trained to deliver this. However, due to staff shortages, this programme is not being taught as intended, which is to help pupils who are behind in their reading. Nonetheless, you are continuing to prioritise reading. With the help of an external adviser, you are developing staff's knowledge of children's literature. You and your team have carefully reviewed the range of reading books in the school so that pupils are provided with books that match their reading ability.
- Planned actions are being put in place to help pupils with SEND do as well as they can in their work. These pupils and those who the school deem vulnerable have access to remote learning in the same way their peers do. This group of pupils are being provided with additional support. Staff have had training to help them make the best use of the technology. Leaders are ensuring that pupils and their families receive external support wherever necessary.
- The interim executive board has brought experience and insight to the governance of the school. They have an accurate understanding of the school's priorities and what leaders are doing to address these. Members of the board are working closely with the local authority to monitor and evaluate improvements in the school. They have assured themselves about the education that pupils are currently receiving. Board members offer an appropriate balance of support and challenge to school leaders, taking account of the school's circumstances.
- You and your team are continuing to draw on the experience and expertise of the local authority to help the school improve. The local authority has been instrumental in brokering school-to-school support, assisting with recruitment and the school's planning for academy status.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with you, other senior leaders, the chair of the interim executive board, a number of subject leaders and a representative from East Sussex local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 36 free-text responses, and 21 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Frances Nation
Her Majesty's Inspector