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Lisa Dale
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Dear Mrs Dale

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Howbridge Church of England Junior School

Following my remote inspection with Charlie Fordham, 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 at its previous section 5 inspections. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in December 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 subject leaders have the knowledge and skills they need to support teachers to implement the planned curriculum effectively
- ensure that assessment underpins the curriculum in all subjects effectively. This should be done in a way that does not add to teachers' workload.

Context

- Two teachers have left since the previous inspection. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) left in March 2020. The headteacher took on this role, supported by a SENCo from another local school. A new SENCo was appointed in January 2021. A local schools' board (LSB) replaced the governing body in September 2020.
- Before December 2020, only a handful of pupils had to be educated remotely. The numbers of pupils who were educated remotely increased substantially in the last few weeks of term. All pupils experienced working at home by the end of the autumn term.
- About 18% of pupils were being educated on site at the time of this inspection. Approximately 25% of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were in school. About 29% of vulnerable pupils were attending on site.

Main findings

- You have ensured that pupils can continue to follow a broad curriculum whether they are receiving education in school or at home. Many parents' comments on our online survey, Ofsted Parent View, were positive about what you are doing to provide education currently.
- Following the previous inspection, you reviewed the curriculum. Subject leaders had training and support. They produced new curriculum plans in their subjects. Subject leaders have identified the important things that they believe pupils should know. You introduced the new curriculum in September 2020. You know that some subject leaders need more support and training to implement the curriculum well.
- Teachers are following your planned curriculum during the national lockdown. Pupils have daily activities in English, mathematics and their topic work, which includes at least one other subject. In some subjects, such as physical education, science and art, teachers have adapted activities for those pupils working at home. Pupils have the extra opportunities to practise important maths skills that they would usually have in school.

- Pupils attending school on site follow the same curriculum as those at home. They have lessons taught by teachers. Learning support assistants (LSAs) provide extra support to the pupils who are in school who need this. Teachers and LSAs are available online during the school day to help pupils learning at home.
- You have made sure that pupils have what they need to access education remotely. Staff check regularly on the well-being and welfare of vulnerable pupils who are not in school. You have systems in place to follow up any concerns about pupils who are not taking part in remote learning.
- Leaders have trained staff in using technology to provide education remotely. Teachers are checking on pupils' remote learning in a variety of ways. However, this is not yet developed fully or consistent across subjects.
- You have ensured that reading remains a high priority during the national lockdown. You have continued your actions for pupils to read more widely and for pleasure. Pupils can read online books or listen to audio books if they have no reading books available. Teachers know which pupils need most help to improve their reading and this has continued.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn the same range of subjects as their classmates. Teachers adapt work appropriately to meet pupils' needs. The SENCo has ensured that pupils with SEND working at home have what they need to learn and access education remotely. LSAs have had training so that they can give pupils help when working online. The SENCo has ensured that pupils continue to get the help that they need.
- Staff from the Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust (the trust) and LSB regularly check on the work of the school. This enables the trust to hold leaders to account for the education provided. The trust and LSB have ensured that you are meeting the government's expectations for remote education.
- The trust has provided support and training for subject leaders and helped them with curriculum planning. The trust's school improvement leader regularly meets with leaders to check that your actions are making improvements. He, along with a national leader of education from a local school, has provided advice and guidance to leaders. The trust has assisted with devising policies and procedures to provide education at this time.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, including the SENCo, the pastoral lead, the chief executive officer and school improvement advisor of the trust, pupils, staff and the chair and vice chair of the local schools' board to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also joined meetings held for pupils working from home, reviewed online learning and pupils' work in a range of subjects and year groups, listened to pupils reading and observed adults providing additional support to pupils. We looked at the 69 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 43 free-text responses, and 29 staff questionnaires. We also considered correspondence to Ofsted and the school about the remote education being provided.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees (for academies) and the chief executive officer of the Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Academies Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Chelmsford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wilson
Her Majesty's Inspector