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Helen Mullinger
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Dear Mrs Mullinger

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Cuthbert's C of E Junior School

Following my remote inspection with Matt Middlemore, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 25 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in October 2019.

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:

- ensure that all staff have strong subject knowledge in mathematics
- ensure that subject leaders and teachers gain the specific training they need to upgrade subject plans and understand what essential knowledge should be taught, and by when, in each subject from Years 3 to 6
- ensure governors hold the headteacher stringently to account for the quality of education pupils receive.

Context

- Since the last Section 5 inspection in October 2019, a new senior teacher has joined the school. There are four new governors.
- Across the autumn term of 2020, approximately 15% pupils had to be educated remotely at some time.
- At the time of this inspection, approximately 30% of pupils were being educated on site. Seventy-five per cent of vulnerable pupils and approximately 70% of pupils with education, health and care plans were attending on site.

Main findings

- Directly after the previous section 5 inspection, leaders set about tackling the areas identified for improvement. By March 2020, you had made a positive start in enabling necessary changes to take place. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, some pre-planned work did not happen. Despite this, your determination to bring about school-wide improvement is gathering momentum well.
- In September 2020, you assessed that some pupils had fallen behind in writing. Leaders were quick to adjust the way teachers planned the writing curriculum to help pupils get back on track. Initially, such actions helped pupils to improve their handwriting. Leaders' more recent action to provide teachers with specialist training is paying off. Teachers are designing increasingly ambitious sequences of work. Notably, many more pupils are writing in paragraphs and using more complex vocabulary and punctuation.
- Your work to revamp the reading curriculum is well underway. Recent training in phonics is improving staff's subject knowledge. Teachers have reorganised how they teach reading, which is helping pupils to deepen their understanding of what they read. Extra teaching sessions are helping pupils who struggle to read to catch up. Increasingly, these pupils read with greater confidence and accuracy.

- Leaders' work to improve the curriculum in other subjects is not as far forwards. In mathematics, additional staff training is bringing about gradual improvements in how teachers plan sequences of work. Nonetheless, leaders' plans to improve mathematics are still at an early stage. Some weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge remain.
- Staff are embracing the need to upgrade curriculum plans in every subject. However, subject leaders and teachers have not had the training they need to help them reshape curriculum plans other than in English and mathematics. Some newly devised subject plans do not set out the essential knowledge pupils need to know or by when they need to know it.
- Since January 2021, vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers who are learning in school follow the same curriculum content as pupils who are learning at home. You have made some changes to how staff are delivering some subject content. You have thought clearly about how to keep to this way of working until Easter 2021 so that pupils do not miss any essential subject content from the school's usual curriculum.
- You have introduced a useful system for pupils who are learning from home to alert their teachers when they get stuck. This is helping pupils overcome barriers to learning and see success. Pupils who need to catch up in reading, writing and mathematics receive extra teaching at school and remotely. This is helping pupils both to 'catch up' and 'keep up' with their work.
- The special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) coordinator is taking precise action to support pupils with SEND. Notably, she is checking whether these pupils can access and complete their work. Pupils' needs are being accurately identified, and provided for, regardless of whether they are learning at home or at school.
- Governors' current work to assure themselves that pupils have the digital resources they need to access education at home or at school is effective. However, governors are not yet holding leaders stringently to account for designing and implementing an ambitious curriculum. They are not challenging leaders enough about how well pupils are being prepared for their next stage of education.
- The local authority has brokered much external leadership and subject support. Specialist leaders in English and mathematics are providing training for teachers. Some pre-planned support has not happened due to COVID-19 restrictions. As such, in the coming weeks, important coaching and support are planned in mathematics, curriculum design and leadership.

Evidence

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

We also looked at pupils' work. This included pupils who are learning at school and those who are learning remotely. We reviewed school documentation, including whole-school curriculum plans and governors' minutes. We listened to pupils read. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 16 free-text responses, and 21 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector