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Lauren O'Connor
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Dear Mrs O'Connor

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Matthew Haynes, 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 four successive judgements of requires improvement. 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 (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:

- establish a full understanding of what pupils have learned this term in all subjects
- use this information to adapt subsequent curriculum planning to support pupils' future learning effectively.

Context

- Since the last inspection in December 2019, four governors and four teachers have left the school, and three governors and three teachers have joined.
- Across the autumn term 2020, a small proportion of pupils were educated at home.
- At the time of this inspection, just over two fifths of pupils were being educated on site. This included three quarters of the vulnerable pupils at the school and three fifths of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Main findings

- Leaders have worked hard to make sure that pupils continue to learn in all subjects during the current circumstances. They are committed to making sure pupils do not fall behind and are determined to support all pupils well. Expectations of the work pupils are required to do remotely have been communicated clearly to pupils and their families. Leaders have checked that pupils have the right equipment and resources to help them learn effectively at home.
- Leaders have continued their work to improve the curriculum over the past year, despite the challenges due to the pandemic. Historic weaknesses in curriculum planning have led to pupils having gaps in their essential knowledge. Leaders report that pupils were beginning to catch up by the end of the autumn term because of the new curriculum they implemented in September 2020. Despite leaders' efforts, they recognise that this rate of improvement has dipped this term.
- Teachers have thoughtfully adapted the curriculum to meet the current challenges. Leaders monitor pupils' engagement with their learning rigorously, following up swiftly where necessary. As a result, pupils' engagement is strong.
- Teachers check pupils' work and provide them with useful advice about how to improve. However, leaders do not have a complete picture of what pupils have learned since the start of January 2021. This means that leaders are not

yet fully able to make sure that teaching and pupils' work focus on the right things in the future.

- Leaders rightly prioritise the teaching of reading and phonics. Appropriate plans are in place to provide support for pupils who need to catch up. Teachers deliver the phonics programme to all pupils, including those learning at home. They provide pupils with books that are well matched to pupils' reading ability and that help them to practise the sounds they learn. Staff supply a range of resources to help parents to support their children's reading at home.
- Staff know vulnerable pupils well. They have worked hard to ensure that the large majority of vulnerable pupils and children of key workers currently attend school. These pupils work in small groups with staff who give them specific help when needed. Clear procedures are in place for checking the welfare of pupils learning at home and to provide them with support with their learning.
- The curriculum for pupils with SEND has been carefully adapted to meet the needs of pupils learning on site and at home. For those pupils with SEND who are learning at home, teachers maintain regular contact with pupils and their families. Teachers aim to make sure that pupils have the right support with their learning. Pupils with SEND who are attending on site work closely with staff who know them well. This has helped to provide pupils with some stability during a time of significant change. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) continues to work in partnership with specialist agencies, such as the educational psychologist, to ensure pupils continue to get the right support.
- Governors demonstrate a sharp insight into the school's priorities. They ask challenging questions and hold leaders to account for their actions. Governors have assured themselves about the arrangements for pupils' learning, whether they are on site or at home. They had begun monitoring how well the new curriculum was being implemented during the autumn term. However, recent challenges mean this has slowed down. Governors rightly identify this as a priority.
- The local authority provides effective support and challenge, offering timely, focused guidance in specific aspects of the school's work such as behaviour, leadership and curriculum development. The Diocese of Portsmouth has continued to monitor how the school is improving and has played a key role in strengthening the governing body by appointing three foundation governors.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, including the SENCo, several subject leaders, three governors, including the chair of

the governing body, a representative of the local authority and of the Diocese of Portsmouth to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also looked at minutes of governing body meetings. We spoke to two groups of pupils and looked at examples of pupils' work. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 18 free-text responses, and 33 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Louise Walker
Her Majesty's Inspector