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Sharon Betts
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Betts

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Catherine's Primary School

Following my remote inspection of your school on 2 March 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 at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in March 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:

- improve curriculum leaders' subject knowledge so that they can plan a high-quality and coherent curriculum in all subjects.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant staffing changes. There are three new teachers, including the headteacher who started in September 2019 and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), who started in September 2020.
- The Department for Education is deciding whether to close the school at the end of the summer term 2021. No final decision has yet been made.
- Across the autumn term of 2020, around 30% of pupils were educated remotely at some point, due to COVID-19. Pupils in Year 2 were affected the most.
- At the time of this inspection, approximately 30% of pupils were being educated at home. Around 85% of vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), were attending on site. This includes those pupils with an education, health and care plan.

Main findings

- Leaders and trustees are taking the necessary actions to provide education in the current circumstances. You are determined to 'put the pupils first', despite the many challenges that you face.
- Leaders are taking the right steps to adapt the curriculum in English and mathematics. Teachers have checked what pupils know and can remember in reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, they have found gaps in pupils' knowledge of, for example, number and place-value in mathematics. You have rightly targeted these areas to help pupils to catch up.
- Curriculum leaders have started to plan the curriculum in each subject. However, there are weaknesses in the plans for history and computing. Leaders lack subject knowledge and, consequently, they are not clear about what pupils should learn, or how knowledge connects.
- Leaders have rapidly improved the teaching of reading. Your conviction that 'reading is the gateway to learning' is reflected in the organisation of the school day, including in the early years foundation stage. Pupils enjoy their daily phonics lessons. They look forward to story time and book club in the recently refurbished library.

- Leaders and those responsible for governance are improving the school for pupils with SEND. Pupils and their parents have regular opportunities to speak with class teachers and the SENCo. During the period of the pandemic, you have ensured that there is appropriate academic and pastoral support for pupils with SEND, including for the few pupils who have been learning from home.
- You have taken the right actions to ensure that vulnerable pupils and children of key workers who are not in school have appropriate equipment to access remote education.
- The interim academy board (IAB) has played a critical role in ensuring that pupils can access education in the current circumstances. Trustees have maintained regular contact with you throughout the pandemic. For example, they have completed quality assurance checks through remote visits. Trustees have also maintained a strong focus on wider school improvement.
- You are successfully using external partners to support leadership and curriculum development. For example, leadership mentoring is improving leaders' understanding of their responsibilities. Teachers are benefiting from the support of a local primary school, to help them to improve the quality of education.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. I spoke to you and other leaders, such as the early years foundation stage leader and the SENCo, to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

I also met with trust leaders and governors, including members of the IAB. I observed pupils from Years 1 to 3 read to a teaching assistant and discussed the curriculum with subject leaders. I reviewed the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 18 free-text responses, and 10 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of Plymouth CAST multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Plymouth, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dorset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector