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18 March 2021

Sandra Jennings
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jennings

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Nicholas' C of E Middle School

Following my remote inspection with Mark Sims, 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 have serious weaknesses.

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 have serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in February 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:

- check the impact of additional interventions and support to ensure that it is helping pupils to catch up with missed learning
- provide pupils with more support and encouragement to read regularly and often at home, in order to develop their reading fluency.

Context

- Since the previous inspection in February 2020, the head of school has been appointed as the new federation headteacher. The leadership team has been restructured. A new chair and vice chair of the local governing board were appointed in September 2020.
- In the autumn term, the school had to shut for four days due to the large number of COVID-19 cases. Therefore, all pupils had to work remotely. Pupils in Year 7 had to self-isolate more than once.
- At the time of the inspection, a quarter of pupils were being educated in school. Approximately half of pupils identified as vulnerable were learning in school. The vast majority of pupils with education, health and care plans were attending school.

Main findings

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have been working well to address the weaknesses that existed. For example, middle leaders have received training for their roles. They have revised plans so that the sequence of pupils' learning is mapped out in more detail. Middle leaders have begun to monitor their subjects and are seeing more consistency in planning across the school. As a result, there have been some improvements in the curriculum and subject leadership. However, due to the pandemic, some of this activity has slowed.
- Leaders use assessment to address gaps in learning, both remotely and in school. Teachers feed back to pupils in a variety of ways through their remote learning platform, including giving written and verbal responses. If pupils need extra help, teachers give them additional support tasks. Teachers also make phone calls home to support pupils' learning.
- Teachers were able to teach via your remote learning platform from the beginning of this lockdown, as pupils had already been using it in school. You have adapted your curriculum so that pupils who are not currently attending school can access remote education. Pupils cover the same content as those in school. You have adapted planning in some subjects, such as science and physical education, because of limited access to resources. The school's remote education offer includes a mix of pre-recorded and directed tasks.

Leaders have worked hard to improve home access to appropriate internet devices. All pupils who need devices to access remote learning, now have them.

- Leaders provide pupils with additional interventions and support to help them catch up with missed learning. However, leaders have not had the opportunity to measure the impact of strategies that have been put in place, so they do not yet know if the extra support is helping pupils to close gaps in their learning.
- Reading has been a key focus for improvement. There is a clear structure for the teaching of reading that all teachers follow. Vocabulary is taught every day as leaders identified this as a previous area of weakness. Some staff have received phonics training and support pupils who need additional phonics teaching. Pupils in school continue to have access to high-quality reading books. Pupils who are working at home are given suggestions of ways to access different reading texts. However, leaders are not ensuring that pupils read often enough at home. Leaders are aware that previous lockdowns have had a negative impact on the reading fluency of pupils who are learning remotely. This continues to be the case in the current lockdown.
- Leaders are ensuring that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are getting the support they need. The new inclusion classroom started in January 2021 despite lockdown. Pupils with SEND are given additional work matched to their individual needs, either online or as paper copies, and this is supporting them to make the progress they need.
- Governors have a good knowledge and understanding of the challenges leaders and staff face in the current pandemic. They provide suitable support. They are well informed about the school's current curriculum offer, including limitations on teaching certain subjects. They understand the strategies that leaders have used to engage parents in their children's remote education. They recognise that, although progress has been made, there is still work to do. Leaders have not lost sight of long-term improvement goals despite the pandemic.
- The school has responded well to external support and challenge from their school improvement partner. Leaders meet regularly with members of the multi-academy trust, who hold them to account.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, teaching staff, the chair and vice chair of the governing board, a school improvement partner and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Diocese of Worcester multi-academy trust to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown. We also looked at some curriculum plans, remote

education resources, information on the school's website and pupils' work. We looked at 66 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 119 free-text responses, and 29 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the Diocese of Worcester multi-academy trust, the director of education for the diocese of Worcestershire, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Eve Morris
Her Majesty's Inspector