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Siobhan Moran
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Dear Mrs Moran

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

Following my remote inspection with Mark Howes, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), 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 have serious weaknesses.

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 was judged to have serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in January 2018.

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:

- accurately identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and use this information to better inform teaching plans
- strengthen the focus on the most vulnerable pupils, including those made vulnerable through the COVID-19 pandemic, so that appropriate help can be provided to help pupils catch up and then keep up.

Context

- Since the last section 5 inspection there have been significant changes at senior leadership level. The headteacher retired in July 2018. Two periods of temporary executive headship followed. Since June 2020, an acting headteacher and an acting deputy headteacher have been in post. A new chair of the governing body was appointed in July 2018.
- Across the autumn term 2020, approximately one quarter of pupils had to be educated remotely. No class 'bubbles' were sent home, but most year groups were affected due to pupils having periods of self-isolation.
- At present, a fifth of pupils are being educated on site. This includes all those pupils who are vulnerable and a third of those pupils with education, health and care plans.

Main findings

- You acted quickly to provide remote education when the school closed to most pupils in January 2021. Pupils attending school and those at home study the same curriculum. Pupils are expected to attend four live lessons, including a reading session, each day. This is a change from the summer 2020 term, when work was mainly paper based. Pupils enjoy interacting with their teacher and seeing their friends online. Leaders follow-up with pupils who do not engage in lessons or return their work.
- The curriculum has been a focus for improvement since the last inspection. You have not let the barriers posed by COVID-19 diminish your commitment to improving the education offered. You work with subject leaders to plan and sequence what you want pupils to learn in each year group. Teachers build opportunities for pupils to revisit and practise what they have previously learned. Subjects such as mathematics, history, geography and science are more developed than others. Some plans are yet to be implemented fully because subjects such as modern foreign languages, music and art and design have not been taught throughout this period of national lockdown. This makes it harder for teachers to address any gaps pupils may have in these subjects.

- Reading remains a priority for the school, hence the additional timetabled session focused on reading. Teachers provide daily phonics lessons which help pupils keep up with their reading. Teachers create opportunities in other lessons for pupils to develop and use their reading skills. Printed resources and materials on the website help those working at home. Extra one-to-one help is given, and you have already begun to identify pupils falling behind. You have plans in place to address this immediately when they return to school.
- You support families with home schooling by providing access to technology and through regular phone calls. Teachers adapt the curriculum so that the activities can be completed more easily at home. For example, teachers have swapped over units in science so that Year 4 pupils currently focus on animals and will study electricity when they return to school. Teachers check what pupils know in live lessons and pupils receive regular feedback on the work they upload. Work shared with inspectors indicates that work completed at home is of a similar standard to that completed in school.
- All vulnerable pupils attend school. They benefit from additional small-group and one-to-one support. You identify pupils who struggle with learning at home and invite them into school. These pupils say that they like 'real school rather than virtual school'. You and your staff constantly watch for any pupil who may become newly vulnerable.
- Parents comment positively on the way in which staff continue to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). You ensure that pupils get the help and specialist support they need through bespoke programmes of work. Weekly telephone calls with parents enable an honest dialogue about how their children are coping. Pupils with SEND working in school benefit from the small class bubbles and additional attention.
- Changes in the leadership of the governing body have been instrumental in developing and improving the effectiveness of governance in the school. Governors understand their roles and the responsibility to hold leaders to account. They check the quality of education, including remote learning, for themselves. Governors are mindful of where the school was but have high ambition for it to be even better. They are not complacent.
- School leaders make good use of external support and advice. Links with both a phonics hub and a mathematics hub have helped to improve the curriculum in these subject areas. Leaders work successfully with the local authority on a project to raise the attainment of vulnerable pupils. Additional coaching from advisers in the local authority and the diocese support leaders to take the right action to improve the school.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, pupils, representatives of those responsible for governance, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We heard pupils read and looked at work pupils had completed remotely and submitted to school. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and took into account 40 free-text responses, and 17 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Nicola Harwood
Her Majesty's Inspector