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Simon Davies
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Dear Mr Davies

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Balfour Primary School

Following my remote inspection with James Broadbridge, 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 require improvement.

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 has received two successive judgements of requires improvement. 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 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:

- review the effectiveness of strategies to ensure all pupils participate fully in their learning
- continue to develop provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), particularly across the wider curriculum.

Context

- Staffing has been stable since the last inspection. The two assistant headteachers have taken on the role of English subject leaders.
- Across the autumn term 2020, around a quarter of pupils had to be educated remotely at some point while they self-isolated.
- At the time of this inspection, just over a third of pupils were being educated on site for at least part of the week. This includes around a third of vulnerable pupils and about a quarter of all those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Main findings

- The majority of pupils are not in school currently. You are rightly proud of the quality of the remote learning on offer. The school made what one parent described as a 'dramatic shift in the quality of online learning' ahead of the current lockdown. You achieved that by drawing on recent research about effective remote education and taking account of the views of parents, staff and pupils about their experience last year. As a result, most pupils are continuing to learn whether they are at home or in school. However, there is a hard core of pupils who, despite all the strategies staff have used, are not fully taking part. They are missing some important learning.
- Senior leaders and subject leads have forged ahead with work to revamp the wider curriculum. New plans, which clearly identify the key knowledge and concepts that pupils must understand, remember and be able to apply in each subject, were in place for the beginning of this school year. Work has started to ensure a more seamless progression from early years.
- Leaders are ensuring that staff stick to subject plans as far as possible in the current circumstances so that pupils' learning continues to build over the course of this year. Mostly, teaching in school and remotely is mirroring the usual curriculum content. Some sensible adaptations have been made to leave teaching practical elements in some subjects or sensitive aspects of personal education until all pupils are back in school.
- Reading and writing plans have been adjusted this school year to focus on getting pupils fully back up to speed after the first lockdown. In phonics, for

example, staff are revisiting sounds from last spring onwards as well as planning to cover all this year's usual work. To date, plans are on track because phonics teaching has continued in school and remotely via video this term. Leaders have invested in suitable reading books so that pupils learning to read can practise their skills.

- As far as they have been able to, leaders have made sure that all pupils who would benefit from being in school have been able to attend for at least part of the week. Effective systems are in place to ensure leaders have good oversight of pupils' learning and well-being if they are not in school.
- Pupils with SEND in school continue to receive tailored support. Leaders began work last year to improve provision for pupils with SEND, training staff to focus on good quality classroom provision rather than relying on pupils receiving individual support. This has had an impact in English and mathematics, as seen in the way staff understand the need to adapt tasks for pupils who are currently working from home. Leaders know, however, there is more to be done to make sure this is consistent across the school and other subjects.
- Governors have adopted a much more strategic role over the past year or so. Having been party to frank discussions about what needed to improve in the school, they have held leaders to account for continuing that work despite the competing demands of the pandemic. Alongside, they have focused on the 'here and now', checking that the remote learning on offer reflects the ambitions of the school's policy, while keeping a watchful eye on staff well-being. Governors are well informed about the various means leaders have used to encourage all pupils to fully participate in learning this term but have yet to evaluate the impact.
- The local authority has helped to strengthen leadership in the school. Officers were instrumental in the crucial appointments of you and the new chair of governors towards the end of 2019. Other leaders have benefited from coaching to grow into their roles. Training for governors has developed their effectiveness. The school has also gained from learning from and sharing practice with other schools locally.

Evidence

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

We also listened to pupils read and considered information available on the school's website about the curriculum and remote learning. We looked at responses to

Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 101 free-text responses, and 57 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Bradley
Her Majesty's Inspector