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Rebecca Hann
Head of School
Thomas Walling Primary Academy
Lindfield Avenue
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Dear Ms Hann

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Thomas Walling Primary Academy

Following my remote inspection with Gill Wild, 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 January 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:

- ensure that governors clearly identify their follow-up actions when they check the work of leaders. This includes identifying exactly what they will do, with precise timescales, so that they can better hold leaders to account.

Context

- Staff changes since October 2019 include the appointment of two teachers. One teacher has left the school. Three teaching assistants have joined the school and seven have left. Five governors have resigned from the local governing board and seven new governors have been appointed.
- A small number of pupils had to learn from home for a period of time, because of COVID-19, during the autumn term 2020.
- During this inspection, the school was open to vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers. One fifth of pupils were attending school and the remainder of pupils were being educated at home. A small number of vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were attending school.
- At the time of this inspection, no staff members were absent due to COVID-19.

Main findings

- All leaders have prioritised providing education for all pupils during the current circumstances. Curriculum leaders have adapted their plans for pupils working in school and at home. You have made sure that any adjustments to the curriculum still allow pupils to build on what they already know or can do. For practical reasons, leaders have re-ordered the content of some subjects. For example, you have delayed swimming sessions until the summer term. Other aspects of physical education follow a sequence that enables pupils to develop their knowledge and skills.
- Leaders provide a remote education package for all pupils who are not in school. Pupils can access online learning, live streaming of lessons and some practical activities. Leaders plan this work to match, where possible, the lessons that pupils receive if they are in school. Teachers are in regular contact with pupils working from home. Pupils and parents are able to tell staff if work is too difficult or easy. If this is the case, teachers further adapt the work.
- Leaders ensure that vulnerable pupils receive support whether in school or working remotely. Teachers check that all pupils are taking part in remote lessons. Leaders act swiftly to tackle any difficulties that families may have. You provide resources to pupils who need help to access the curriculum from home. This includes providing laptops, or basic equipment such as pencils or

exercise books. Several parents expressed their appreciation of this support. They recognise that this enables their children to access their education.

- You prioritise reading and phonics, particularly for pupils in the earliest stages of learning to read. All children in Reception and pupils in Years 1 and 2 access a daily phonics lesson in school or at home. Reading books for these pupils match the letters and sounds that they know. Older pupils access reading books in school and online. This is to help them become fluent readers. All teachers recently attended phonics training.
- The special educational needs coordinator reviews curriculum plans for pupils with SEND. Pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs are a high priority. As a result, teachers adapt the work they set to help pupils manage any challenges they face. This includes supporting pupils with SEND who are not in school. Pupils access online support programs to assist with learning in reading and mathematics. In this way, pupils continue to receive the support sessions that benefit them.
- Governors check that leaders provide education for all pupils in the current circumstances. They ask challenging questions of leaders relating to pupil and staff well-being. They review curriculum and remote education plans. They recognise when some things need to improve. However, the system for governors to check on these areas is not established. Governors arrange to revisit these aspects with leaders, but the timings and focus of these return visits are too vague.
- You and your leaders have a strong network with other leaders in the multi-academy trust. You appreciate and value the support provided by the trust. Leaders work well with a range of curriculum consultants. This includes working with the local mathematics hub. Leaders seek relevant guidance to help adapt the curriculum in the current circumstances.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, your senior leaders, the executive principal, the chief operating officer, pupils and members of the local governing board, to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also listened to pupils reading to adults in school and looked at samples of work completed in school and through remote education. We talked to some pupils about their experiences in school. We looked at 22 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 14 free-text responses, and 40 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of trustees and the chief operating officer of The Laidlaw Trust, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alison Aitchison
Her Majesty's Inspector