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Mark McCadden
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Dear Mr McCadden

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Birdham CE Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Kathryn Moles, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 4 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 March 2019.

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:

- complete work on the curriculum so that a clear progression of knowledge and skills supports pupils' learning in all subjects.

Context

- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is new to this role since the last inspection, as is the chair of the governing body.
- During the autumn term, about a fifth of pupils across the school self-isolated at some point while they or a family member waited for a COVID-19 test result.
- At the time of this inspection, one third of pupils were attending school and two thirds of pupils were learning remotely. About a half of pupils who are vulnerable and a third of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were attending school on site.

Main findings

- Leaders are making sure that all pupils continue to receive an education in this period of national lockdown. Most pupils are learning remotely and teachers are using a well-considered mix of live and pre-recorded lessons for those at home. Leaders have given laptops to pupils who need them to access the learning online. They are ensuring staff check on pupils' well-being and learning. If concerns arise about pupils' engagement in their work, staff quickly contact families to offer support. Teachers give helpful feedback about learning, so pupils know how to improve their work.
- Leaders are finding it challenging to teach aspects of some subjects to pupils at home. Pupils learning remotely do not have all the resources they need, such as instruments for music lessons or equipment for physical education (PE) sessions, so they are not experiencing the planned curriculum. In some subjects, such as science, leaders have sensibly adjusted the order of what is taught, so that teachers cover some practical aspects when all pupils return to school.
- Leaders have improved planning for English and mathematics since the last inspection, so that pupils' learning builds up over time. However, work on the rest of the curriculum has been slow and further hindered by the pandemic. Leaders have wrestled with balancing developing the curriculum further with the challenge of providing remote education over the last year. In subjects such as history, religious education (RE) and music, they have yet to decide on the content and order of what knowledge to teach. Elsewhere, for example in geography, leaders have started to carefully amend commercially produced plans to meet the needs of their pupils.

- Leaders have ensured that vulnerable pupils are supported well. Those attending school benefit from extra support in lessons. Pupils who are learning remotely receive extra well-being checks and additional support for learning through online sessions.
- All pupils are benefiting from extra opportunities to read each day and to listen to their teacher read to their class. Staff have continued to teach phonics sessions daily to younger pupils at home and at school. Teachers are closely checking the progress of those who are attending school. They are making sure that these pupils practise their skills by reading books that are linked to the sounds they are learning. Teachers have found it difficult to accurately check the phonics skills of pupils who are learning remotely. They cannot be sure the books these pupils are reading are matched to the sounds they have learned
- The SENCo has supported parents of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well, offering practical advice whether pupils are learning at home or school. Pupils attending school have benefited from their usual adult support. Those at home are having additional live sessions daily, for example in mathematics. Some pupils have been invited to attend on site a few days before everyone else returns to help ease their transition back into school.
- Governors have assured themselves that all pupils are receiving an education. They have also checked how leaders know that pupils are engaging in learning. Governors' understanding of the curriculum is less well developed. Their knowledge of how well the school is doing is based on reading, writing and mathematics results more than an understanding of what pupils know and can do across a range of subjects.
- After the last inspection, the local authority brokered support from the local teaching school alliance which helped to develop English and mathematics plans. Since March 2020, the local authority has supported the school to manage its response to COVID-19. Effective support from the diocese has helped leaders to manage staff well-being during this period.

Evidence

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

We also listened to pupils read, looked at curriculum planning, remote lessons and work samples. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 49 free-text responses, and 14 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Laurie Anderson
Her Majesty's Inspector