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Dear Mr Turner

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Durham Gilesgate Primary

Following my remote inspection with Noeman Anwar, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 25 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 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 June 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:

- ensure that pupils can access books that are closely matched to their reading abilities
- improve subject leaders' expertise in art, and design and technology to make effective changes to the curriculum.

Context

- There have been no changes to key staff since the previous inspection. The vice-chair has taken on the role of acting chair of governors.
- Across the autumn term 2020, approximately a quarter of pupils had to be educated remotely. No pupils needed to self-isolate repeatedly. No whole classes or year groups were affected.
- At the time of this inspection, just over a quarter of pupils were being educated in school. Almost all vulnerable pupils were attending on site. A small number of pupils with education, health and care plans were being educated remotely.

Main findings

- Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking the necessary actions to provide education in the current circumstances. Pupils study the same subjects, whether they are at home or at school. Teachers and leaders check how well pupils are doing their work. They provide regular feedback and support to help pupils learn.
- Following the previous inspection, leaders prioritised the development of the curriculum. Subject leaders started to improve their knowledge and expertise. They looked at what was working well in their subject and what needed to change. Leaders planned what content would be taught across the year and made some positive changes in some subjects. However, this work was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. When national restrictions are lifted, leaders intend to focus on improving pupils' knowledge in art, and design and technology.
- Leaders are adapting subjects effectively to meet the current challenges. Some content within subjects has been moved so that it can be covered later in the year. For example, fractions will be taught when all pupils return to school because teachers feel this area of mathematics is difficult to teach remotely. Leaders and teachers have thought carefully about how subjects are sequenced. They considered what resources and help pupils need to succeed. As a result, the number of pupils engaging in remote education has increased.

- Leaders provide effective support for vulnerable pupils. Teachers check how well pupils are learning and give support to those who are struggling. They keep in regular contact with parents and carers to provide support and advice. Parents appreciate this support.
- Leaders have improved how reading is taught. Pupils read every day and access online books to help them read fluently. Teachers create 'story time' videos to encourage pupils to enjoy stories. Teachers have revised the way they teach phonics. They now follow a single, more structured approach. Pupils up to Year 2 receive daily phonics lessons. Some pupils have extra reading sessions with an adult to help them catch up. However, the books pupils read are not matched closely enough to the sounds that they have learned. Leaders have allocated funding for additional books to address this issue.
- Leaders provide tailored support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They make sure that pupils access the learning, resources and therapeutic provision they need. Parents also benefit from the additional support leaders provide. For example, pupils with hearing impairments and their parents receive additional virtual and in-person help from specialist staff. This helps pupils to access the learning provided for their class.
- Governors understand their role and provide challenge and support. They meet regularly with leaders and ask appropriate questions. These meetings lead to improvements in the way education is provided.
- Leaders work closely with the local authority to improve the school. Subject leaders receive support and training. This has improved their ability to check the quality of their plans and make improvements. The positive impact of leaders' work has been delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders and local authority representatives are committed to continuing this beneficial work.

Evidence

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

We also looked at samples of pupils' work and viewed recorded lessons. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 12 free-text responses, and 18 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 Durham County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrea Bedeau
Her Majesty's Inspector