

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



14 April 2021

Tracy McKenzie
Headteacher
Hillside Primary School
Belstead Avenue
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP2 8NU

Dear Miss McKenzie

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Hillside Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Fyfe Johnston, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 16 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.

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 October 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 curriculum plans in subjects such as history and geography identify for teachers what they need to teach, why and when, so that new learning builds on what pupils already know.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher left and an interim headteacher was appointed. An executive headteacher was appointed in January 2020 who took on the leadership of the school when the interim headteacher left in spring 2020. You were appointed as headteacher in September 2020.
- A restructure of the leadership team has streamlined responsibilities across the school.
- When the school was closed to most pupils at the start of the spring term, 85% of pupils worked from home. 40% of vulnerable pupils attended on site. All pupils with an education, health and care plan attended on site.
- At the time of this inspection, 15% of pupils were working from home. This included the whole of Year 5 and a small number of other pupils who were self-isolating.

Main findings

- Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, systems for teaching English and mathematics had been used more consistently than seen in the previous inspection. Staff had had training on how to deliver these effectively. Pupils talk clearly about what they have learnt in these subjects.
- During the period of partial closure in spring 2020, you decided not to teach some curriculum content that would have been impractical for pupils to learn remotely. Now that pupils have returned, these kinds of learning, such as completing practical work in science and playing instruments in music, have too. Pupils told us how much they enjoyed the experiments they completed during 'science week'. They remembered well the key scientific vocabulary that they had learned.
- In the first week of full opening in March, teachers assessed pupils' phonics knowledge and heard all pupils read. Teachers are using this information to plan activities that are helping pupils to read more fluently and swiftly.
- Some pupils have gaps in their learning due to previous weaker teaching. Leaders are aware that the periods of school closure may have increased these and teachers are checking for any lack of understanding. In mathematics, teachers are focusing on the four operations, knowledge of

number facts and fluency until the end of the summer term. In science, they are prioritising content that they know will not be revisited next year. For example, Year 5 will learn about space as this is not covered in Year 6.

- In some subjects, such as history and geography, curriculum plans are not fully developed. These plans do not make it clear enough what pupils will learn. Pupils spoken to have less recollection of what they had learnt in those subjects than in English and science.
- Effective arrangements are in place to support pupils who are working remotely. Pupils who have to return home because of an outbreak of COVID-19 are immediately provided with online lessons. Staff also ensure that individual pupils who need to isolate at home can also access online learning.
- All teachers have had extensive training in up-to-date, research informed teaching techniques. They value this. Subject leaders are benefiting from their involvement in trust-wide subject leader groups and training.
- Teachers are using the skills learnt in their training to help support all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers use questioning and open-ended tasks to make work challenging as well as accessible for pupils.
- During the closure period, staff made sure that vulnerable pupils were safe. All were offered places in school. Staff kept in touch regularly with those pupils who stayed at home, by making phone calls and carrying out home visits.
- The governing body have kept themselves updated during the pandemic. They are supportive and are also willing to challenge leaders and the trust when necessary, to ensure the best possible education for pupils. For example, they have increased their focus on how leaders are getting families to engage with any remote learning.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, multi-academy trust leaders, staff and pupils. We also spoke to members of the governing body.

We looked at 42 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 17 free-text responses, and 45 staff questionnaires. We heard pupils read and sampled online learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Active Learning multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tessa Holledge
Her Majesty's Inspector