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Tracy Edwards and Michael Lawrence
Headteachers
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Dear Mrs Edwards and Mr Lawrence

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Elmhurst Junior School

Following my remote inspection with Lydia Pride, 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 January 2020.

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 teachers provide pupils with precise advice to improve their writing
- ensure subject leaders develop detailed and well-sequenced plans in the wider curriculum.

Context

- One new governor has been appointed since the previous inspection.
- At the start of the spring term, when the school was closed to most pupils, 75% of pupils were educated at home. A small number of vulnerable pupils were eligible to attend the school site. Approximately 80% of these pupils attended during this period. Virtually all the pupils who have education, health and care plans were educated at school during this period.
- At the time of this inspection, all pupils were attending on site.

Main findings

- When schools partially closed on 23 March 2020, you had just started to make changes to the curriculum. Throughout the period of restrictions, you and your senior leadership team have successfully adapted the existing curriculum so that all pupils are provided with education. At the same time, you have been determined to press forward with the improvements you had already planned.
- Leaders introduced a phonics programme for pupils who struggle with reading in Year 3. They adapted this well during the COVID-19 restrictions by using video resources. This helped most, but not all, of these pupils to continue learning phonics. Now that all pupils are back in school, staff have wasted no time in assessing pupils' knowledge and starting this programme up again. As a result, pupils are beginning to get back on track with their early reading skills.
- You have provided training for staff on teaching reading. Pupils' reading books are chosen well. They match pupils' reading skills. You have raised expectations of how much pupils should read at home. Consequently, pupils are reading more. Staff provide extra support in school for any pupils who find it difficult to read at home.
- In summer 2020, subject leaders reviewed the curriculum. Senior leaders planned to provide coaching for subject leaders to help them develop the curriculum. However, the COVID-19 restrictions have hindered this work. Consequently, plans in the wider curriculum still lack detail.

- Teachers provide pupils with activities that allow them to settle back into school. They encourage pupils to reflect and talk about their recent experiences. At the same time, teachers are assessing carefully in which areas of the curriculum pupils may need extra help.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about returning to school, but many of them lack confidence in writing. Teachers' expertise in helping pupils to improve their writing is not consistent across the school. In mathematics, teachers have found that pupils need more support to understand fractions. As a result, the subject leader has made suitable modifications to the sequence of teaching to prioritise this work in the summer term.
- Senior leaders have paid close attention to vulnerable pupils' welfare throughout the pandemic. The parent and family support adviser, teaching assistants and other staff provide effective support for these pupils.
- The special educational needs coordinator has improved the system for allocating extra help for pupils. Therefore, additional help for these pupils is better targeted at their individual needs.
- A school improvement adviser, commissioned by Somerset County Council, offers useful guidance to you and your senior leadership team. However, support from two local schools, which was previously planned, has not yet begun because of COVID-19 restrictions.
- You work closely with the co-chairs of the governing body. They provide suitable challenge and support to you both. This has helped you to ensure all pupils receive education during the current circumstances. Together with governors, you have kept staff well-being as a high priority throughout a particularly difficult year for the school.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, one of the co-chairs of the governing body and one other governor, senior leaders, subject leaders and your school improvement adviser to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also considered documentation including curriculum plans, headteachers' reports to governors, remote learning materials and examples of pupils' work. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 18 free-text responses, and 31 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the co-chairs of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector