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Rebecca Jordan
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Dear Mrs Jordan

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Thorns Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Eve Morris, 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.

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 (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:

- make up for missed phonics teaching for all Reception and Year 1 pupils, and ensure that the weakest readers receive the extra support they need to catch up
- refine how curriculum content is sequenced in subjects such as history and geography so that pupils' knowledge of important concepts builds in a logical order.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, two senior leaders and two teachers have left the school. Three assistant headteachers, four teachers, a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and a family support worker have been appointed. Seven governors have joined the governing body. There is a new chair and vice chair of governors.
- During the autumn term 2020, nearly half of pupils experienced at least one period of remote education because of COVID-19. This included all pupils in the Reception Year and Year 5.
- At the time of this inspection, the school was only open to vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers. Approximately one quarter of pupils were being educated on site. Three quarters of pupils were learning remotely. Approximately one third of vulnerable pupils and two thirds of pupils with education, health and care plans were attending school.

Main findings

- You have ensured that all pupils can receive education in the current circumstances. In recent weeks, you and governors have taken concerted action to increase the number of pupils taking part in remote learning. As a result, almost all pupils are now accessing education.
- Over the past year, you have made real progress in developing a new curriculum. You have planned what you want pupils to learn in each subject and year group, including the early years. You are ensuring that pupils develop knowledge in a broad range of subjects. In some subjects, this knowledge builds in small, incremental steps. In others, there is more to do. For example, in history and geography topics do not build in a logical order. This makes it difficult for pupils to develop a secure understanding of important concepts.
- In most subjects, teachers are continuing to follow the new curriculum plans. The daily timetable for pupils who are learning remotely mirrors a typical school day. Teachers deliver lessons to all pupils through online presentations, recorded videos and work packs. There is a suitable variety of

activities. Teachers have given pupils resources to use at home, for example practical mathematics equipment. As a result, pupils can learn effectively.

- In mathematics, teachers are taking account of missed teaching in summer 2020. They are adjusting plans to ensure that pupils continue to learn things in the right order. In art, physical education and design technology, teachers have changed the content of lessons so that pupils in school and at home can take part. Pupils' knowledge has continued to build. Teachers know what teaching pupils have missed. They are ready to fill these gaps when all pupils return to school.
- Recently, you changed the approach to teaching phonics. There was little time for this to embed before the national lockdown. As a result, many pupils in Reception and Year 1 do not know the sounds you would expect them to know at this time of year. Teachers are delivering a phonics lesson each day. Pupils are continuing to read, and their books match the sounds they know. However, this is not enough to get pupils back on track. In addition, the weakest readers are not receiving enough support to catch up quickly. Pupils in school need more practice to learn and remember new sounds. Those learning remotely are not learning the sounds they need. They are falling further behind.
- Pupils attending school benefit from the support of teaching assistants. Adults explain things first-hand, work with pupils in small groups and help when they get stuck. Pupils learning remotely have far less contact with school staff. For example, pupils do not typically receive direct feedback on their work. Instead, teachers email this to parents to pass on.
- Support is continuing for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils with SEND who are attending school receive much of the support they would in normal times. Teachers adapt work to meet the needs of pupils with SEND who are learning remotely. They give guidance to parents on how to help their children. Staff make regular contact with the families of pupils with SEND to check how they are doing. As a result, these pupils are continuing to learn.
- Governors keep a close eye on the education you are providing. They noticed when pupils' participation in remote education was below their expectations. Governors worked with you to address this. You provide governors with helpful information about your and other leaders' work to improve the curriculum. As a result, governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and next steps.
- The local authority has provided you with guidance on operational matters relating to COVID-19. There has been little support for school improvement, although this is starting to get better. You have been proactive in seeking advice on curriculum development. As a result, the curriculum is increasingly

well planned and sequenced. Subject leaders' knowledge and skills are improving.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, the deputy headteacher, the three assistant headteachers, the early years leader, the SENCo, the family support worker and a group of teachers to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown. We held discussions with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and one governor. We met with a representative of the local authority.

We also listened to a small number of pupils read to a familiar adult. We examined some of the school's curriculum plans and reviewed some examples of remote education. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 24 free-text responses, and 28 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 Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector