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Dear Mrs Richardson

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of West Gate School

Following my remote inspection with Simon Hollingsworth, 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 have serious weaknesses.

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 was judged to have serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in October 2018.

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:

- implement the curriculum pathways and monitor the impact on pupils' learning and progress
- apply the new approach to the teaching of early reading consistently across the school.

Context

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher joined the school in January 2019, taking up their substantive roles in September 2019. The chair of governors took up his post in July 2020. The school business manager was appointed in March 2019.
- Two thirds of pupils were educated at home when the school was closed to most pupils at the start of the spring term 2021.
- At the time of this inspection, almost all pupils were attending on site.
- Currently, a very small number of staff are absent due to COVID-19. Leaders are managing this absence through the use of their own staff.

Main findings

- Leaders and governors are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances. Almost all pupils have returned to school. Staff have ensured a smooth transition to normal routines. There are well-established arrangements for providing remote education for any pupils who may need to learn at home.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have revised the school's curriculum. They have reorganised how pupils learn into four curriculum pathways. Leaders have designed these pathways to closely match pupils' stages of learning and their individual needs. Staff have received training to deliver the curriculum pathways. Until recently, the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 have delayed the full implementation of the revised curriculum.
- Currently, teachers are assessing what gaps pupils may have in their learning. They are using information from parents and from pupils' work to identify pupils' new starting points. This has enabled staff to prioritise extra support where it is most needed. Leaders recognise that COVID-19 restrictions have severely reduced pupils' opportunities to gain work experience in the local community. Similarly, pupils have been unable to use facilities such as the school's shared spaces, the hydrotherapy pool and the soft-play and animal care areas. Staff are devising alternative ways to promote pupils' confidence and independent living skills.

- Leaders and staff place a high priority on communication and reading. Staff produced a series of story-based videos as a key feature of the school's remote education offer. In January 2020, leaders introduced a new, structured approach to the teaching of early reading and phonics. They have not fully established this approach across the school. Pupils who are in the early stages of reading do not always receive consistent support to apply their phonics knowledge when reading unfamiliar words.
- A small number of pupils who are clinically extremely vulnerable to the risk of COVID-19 are currently learning at home. Leaders ensure that remote education for these pupils aligns to their individual needs. Staff keep in regular contact with families and offer prompt support when needed.
- Staff quickly identify any vulnerable pupils. Leaders show persistence in securing support from external agencies, such as health and social care.
- Since the last inspection, there has been considerable turbulence in governance. The current chair and vice chair of governors are experienced and knowledgeable. They are building a skilled team of governors who are continuing to meet remotely. Governors keep in regular contact with the school and show support for leaders' and staff's well-being. They ask probing questions to ensure a strong focus on pupils' education, welfare and safety.
- The local authority has worked closely with the school since its last inspection. This work has included support for leaders in shaping the revised curriculum. This support has helped to strengthen the role of middle leaders and raise teachers' ambition for what pupils can achieve.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, the deputy and assistant headteachers, curriculum leaders, the chair and vice chair of governors and representatives of the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils in the current circumstances.

We also observed pupils reading to a member of staff. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 12 free-text responses, and 97 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 Leicester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Watkins
Her Majesty's Inspector