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16 April 2021

Kathleen Hinton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hinton

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Heather Phillips, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 18 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 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:

- urgently help pupils in Year 1 to catch up quickly in reading.

Context

- There have been considerable changes in school leadership since the previous inspection. A deputy headteacher and a key stage 1 leader have joined the staff. An additional assistant headteacher has been recruited from within the school. An early years leader has left.
- Just under 50% of pupils were educated on site between the start of January and 5 March 2021. During the same period, approximately 40% of vulnerable pupils and 60% of pupils with education, health and care plans were educated in school.
- At the time of this inspection, 95% of pupils were attending on site.

Main findings

- Governors have played a key role in supporting the headteacher to drive school improvement. Their decisive action to expand the school leadership team has improved leaders' ability to lead and manage the school. As a result, leaders are successfully addressing the challenges presented by recent periods of national lockdown. Leaders act diligently to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families are supported well. They have a system in place to ensure that all pupils, including any who may need to isolate in the future, continue to access a broad range of subjects. Parents speak positively about the work that leaders have done to provide education in the current circumstances.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have prioritised improving the quality of the curriculum. They acted quickly to introduce new approaches to teaching mathematics and writing. In some subjects, curriculum leaders worked with professional associations to develop expertise and subject knowledge. This helped them to identify the key knowledge that pupils need to know and remember. However, improvement plans in other subjects, such as science and history, have been delayed. Leaders intend to focus on these subjects later in the year.
- During the most recent period when many pupils were studying at home, teachers made weekly checks on what pupils had remembered. These checks did not provide teachers with the level of detail that their assessments usually would. Therefore, now that pupils have returned to school, teachers are spending more time than usual asking key questions and recapping on previous learning. For example, in mathematics, teachers start morning lessons by asking four questions to help them identify what pupils have

learned. Pupils' responses to these questions inform and shape teachers' planning.

- Leaders are aware that many younger pupils have fallen behind in learning to read. You are particularly concerned that the majority of pupils in Year 1 do not have the phonics knowledge that you expect at this point in the year. Since 8 March, leaders have taken urgent action to help these pupils to catch up. This action has included listening to all pupils read individually, additional afternoon phonics sessions for all pupils, group interventions and one-to-one help for those who need it most.
- Curriculum leaders check their subject plans to ensure that pupils do not miss important elements of learning. They adjust and change the order in which some topics are taught. For example, in design and technology, teachers did not teach cooking and nutrition during the spring term. This was because many pupils did not have the resources that they needed at home. Teachers have now timetabled these lessons in the summer term.
- Leaders believe that educational visits and enrichment experiences are an important part of the school's curriculum. They feel that pupils have missed out because of restrictions to visits taking place. Therefore, leaders have reviewed the curriculum and are starting to plan opportunities to replace the experiences that have been missed. In geography, for instance, leaders intend to introduce a fieldwork project to observe features of the River Severn at Ironbridge.
- Leaders work hard to ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities continue to have their needs met. All of these pupils were encouraged to attend school throughout the pandemic. Those that did benefited from smaller groups and increased adult support. As a result, many of these pupils have grown in confidence. Pupils working at home continued to receive work that was matched to their individual plans. Leaders sensibly invited these pupils back to school in advance of 8 March 2021. Consequently, these pupils returned smoothly to school.
- The Archdiocese of Birmingham and the local authority provide effective support. They worked with you to coach and develop curriculum leaders. This has strengthened leadership through the school and means that teachers are now in a better position to further improve the curriculum offer.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, senior leaders, curriculum leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and pupils. We also spoke with the chair and vice-chair of the local governing body and a representative of the Archdiocese of Birmingham to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also scrutinised a range of documents, including examples of minutes of governing body meetings and samples of curriculum plans. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 22 free-text responses, and 14 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Leonard
Her Majesty's Inspector