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Sian Carr
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Dear Mrs Carr

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Townhill Junior School

Following my remote inspection with Alice Roberts, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 23 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 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 all leaders have secure subject knowledge to create clearly sequenced plans, which identify the knowledge they want pupils to learn
- secure a more consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics
- make sure all staff are trained to teach the school's chosen phonics scheme.

Context

- The school became a foundation school in September 2019. A new governing body was formed when the school joined the Reach Co-operative Trust in September 2020.
- About 70% of pupils were educated at home when the school was partly closed earlier in the spring term. Almost all pupils identified as vulnerable and most pupils with an education, health and care plan were educated on site during this time.
- At the time of this inspection, almost all children were in school. One Year 4 class 'bubble' were continuing their education remotely because they were self-isolating.

Main findings

- Leaders have worked relentlessly to support families and their children during the pandemic. They have been successful in supporting those parents who do not usually have much contact with the school. All pupils at home engaged with learning over the course of the recent partial closure, although leaders know that for a few it was less than others. Many vulnerable pupils were encouraged to attend school on site. When the school fully reopened, staff prioritised pupils' well-being. This helped them settle back into routines well.
- Following the last inspection, leaders started to improve plans for teaching science and the wider curriculum to match the expectations of the national curriculum. They have organised some subject plans, such as computing, to help pupils remember the most important learning for subsequent lessons. In other subjects, leaders are not yet as clear what they want pupils to learn. Leaders are not yet certain what difference the new plans are making to pupils' learning. The pandemic has hindered their capacity to monitor their improvement plans.
- There is still work to be done to improve the quality of the mathematics curriculum. Leaders have made a start on developing planning to support staff. They acknowledge the need to train staff to check more accurately what pupils already know to inform subsequent lessons.

- Now all pupils have returned to school, staff are using various checks to see what they remember, but it is too early for leaders to be sure what this information is telling them. In some subjects, such as science and mathematics, tests have included some knowledge pupils have not yet been taught.
- Staff do not fully understand how to support pupils at the early stages of learning to read. Staff have not had comprehensive training to teach the school's phonics programme. The recent planned training has been delayed by the pandemic. As a result, help in place for these struggling readers does not support them well enough and books are not always accurately matched to sounds they are learning.
- Leaders swiftly provided remote learning for the Year 4 bubble that was closed at the time of this inspection. Leaders improved the remote offer following consultation with parents and pupils after the first period of partial school closure. Activities include live sessions and pre-recorded videos. Pupils learning at home currently have similar lessons to those in school.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who attended school during the partial closure, have grown in confidence due to the smaller class sizes. These pupils became less reliant on adult support and this led to improvements with their learning. Now the school is fully reopened, teachers are reviewing how well all pupils with SEND have achieved their individual targets. Pupils are currently being supported with their pastoral needs and plans are in place to support with learning.
- Governors have held leaders to account for improving pupils' attendance and behaviour. During the pandemic, they have checked that vulnerable pupils are well supported, and that all pupils are continuing to get an education. Governors are not yet holding leaders to account for the quality of education thoroughly enough. They have not made sure that leaders acted with sufficient urgency to tackle the inconsistent teaching of mathematics or that staff are well trained to teach phonics.
- The local authority has provided challenge to the school to help them improve attendance and behaviour. They have also helped with plans to improve the school so that leaders are clear about what they are trying to achieve. Leaders have not yet had the time to check the success of these plans. Leaders have welcomed support from a subject leader in education to write new subject plans in many subjects. Leaders are also making the most of other development opportunities from the trust. These are at an early stage.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other leaders, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance, and a representative of

the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also examined curriculum plans and governing body minutes and listened to pupils read. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including one free-text response, and 24 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the Reach Co-operative Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Southampton local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Laurie Anderson
Her Majesty's Inspector