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Emma Ravenscroft
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Dear Mrs Ravenscroft

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Sidemoor First School

Following my remote inspection with Peter Humphries, 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 special measures.

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 require special measures at its previous section 5 inspection. 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:

- ensure that there are systems in place to accurately identify the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) so that pupils receive the right support at the right time to help them to make strong progress
- continue to develop the curriculum so that the sequence of learning and assessment in subjects in addition to English and mathematics enables pupils to know and remember more about what they are learning
- further improve the systems that senior leaders use to check and evaluate the effect of their actions, drawing on robust evidence that can be used to inform next steps.

Context

- Since the previous inspection there have been many changes. You were appointed as substantive headteacher in September 2020. A new deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have been appointed and will take up their new posts in the summer term. The governing body has a new chair and several new governors have been recruited.
- Between the start of January and 5 March 2021 approximately 30% of pupils attended on site. By the end of this period almost all of the pupils identified as vulnerable were attending on site. Over 80% of pupils who have an education, health and care plan attended on site.
- At the time of this inspection there were no pupils who were being educated remotely.

Main findings

- There is now greater stability in staffing at the school. You and the governing body have prioritised and secured the appointment of a permanent senior leadership team. There have been significant changes to curriculum leadership. Staff who are leading subjects have the skills and knowledge to bring about improvement. However, leaders' checks and evaluation of the effectiveness of their actions are not always detailed enough to inform what happens next.
- Leaders have prioritised pupils' learning in English and mathematics. They have identified that pupils have gaps in their learning because of the impact of COVID-19 but also because of historical weak teaching at the school. These subjects are now well planned and take account of what should be learned from Reception to Year 4, so that pupils can build and deepen their existing knowledge.

- Pupils experience learning in all subjects across the curriculum. However, there is more work to do. Plans in foundation subjects, including modern foreign languages and computing, are not well matched to the needs of pupils and do not take sufficient account of what pupils already know and can do. Leaders have plans to provide further training for teachers as part of their work on curriculum development.
- Teachers are currently checking what pupils have learned since the start of January by reviewing pupils' work and carrying out tests in reading, writing and mathematics. These assessments show that many pupils need more practice with basic skills, so they are being given extra time to do this. For example, although pupils can read accurately many do not read as fluently as they should. Some pupils do not have the stamina for writing that they had previously.
- Using information from teachers' checks, pupils are experiencing a curriculum that is planned on a term-by-term basis. Leaders aim to help all pupils catch up to where they should be, particularly in English and mathematics, so that they can launch a redesigned broad and balanced curriculum in the new academic year.
- Leaders have prioritised reading and there have been huge changes since the last inspection. Phonics is taught daily and pupils read books that are closely matched to the sounds they know. Staff who teach phonics benefit from training which includes bespoke preparation for those who support the weakest readers. Reading for pleasure is promoted and pupils have access to a broad range of fiction and non-fiction texts, from a wide variety of authors and genres.
- Leaders started to implement their plans to improve provision for pupils with SEND at the beginning of the academic year. They reviewed the extra support that some pupils were receiving linked to their social, emotional and mental health, and difficulties with speech and language. This ensured that pupils who need this extra help are getting it. However, further plans for improvement have been hampered by COVID-19 restrictions. Currently, the learning needs of pupils with SEND are not as accurately identified as they might be. This means that pupils are not receiving the support they need to make strong progress.
- The governing body has the necessary expertise to hold leaders to account and to provide the right level of challenge and support. Changes to the organisation and leadership of committees mean that governors have established systems to ensure that they know what is happening in all aspects of the school's work. This includes an oversight of the school's curriculum development.

- The school has received effective support from the local authority and from a multi-academy trust. This has centred on providing training for all staff, including senior leaders, on all aspects of the school's improvement plans. Actions have focused on areas including curriculum development, provision for SEND, assessment and safeguarding. The local authority and the trust acknowledge that COVID-19 has disrupted the pace of improvements and plans are in place to continue with this work.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer of The Black Pear Trust, some subject leaders, pupils and five members of the governing body. We also spoke to a representative of the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 40 free-text responses, and 13 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 Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jo Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector