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Gareth Griffiths
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Dear Mr Griffiths

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Bayards Hill School

Following my remote inspection with Frances Nation, 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 December 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 all staff receive high-quality training to teach the school's chosen phonics programme
- identify the essential knowledge that children need to be taught in the early years curriculum, so they are well prepared for key stage 1
- firmly establish a coherent approach to the school's curriculum and ensure that all staff have the required knowledge to deliver this effectively.

Context

- There have been several leadership changes since the last inspection. A new early years leader joined the school shortly afterwards. The headteacher has become executive headteacher of two primary schools in the trust. There is no longer a chief executive officer post in the trust's structure. New governors have joined the local governing body. Leaders temporarily closed the nursery from the start of this school year.
- Approximately 60% of pupils were educated at home when the school was closed to most pupils earlier this term. Around 65% of vulnerable pupils and those with an education, health and care plan were attending school.
- At the time of this inspection, nearly all pupils were attending school.
- There was significant staff absence at the time of this inspection. Leaders were managing this through internal redeployment and agency staff. A small number of staff who were shielding were working from home.

Main findings

- Leaders made sure that pupils continued with their lessons during the most recent national lockdown. While the school was closed to most pupils, staff continued to teach the usual range of subjects whether pupils were at home or on site. This included pre-recorded sessions that pupils could go back and watch again when needed. Parents are pleased with leaders' efforts to support their children's learning. Leaders' work to improve pupils' engagement in learning is paying off now school is fully open, as most pupils are attending each day.
- Since the previous inspection, the pace of school improvement has been too slow. Leaders have tried to introduce too many new ideas at once. They have not always provided staff with the right training and support to be able to carry out the necessary improvements.

- There has been an unnecessary delay in addressing the weaknesses in the teaching of early reading. Leaders have not ensured that all staff are trained effectively to teach phonics. Decisions about which phonics programme to follow have only been taken very recently. This is leading to inconsistency in how pupils are taught to read. Many pupils require support to catch up with their reading. In key stage 2, pupils are starting to have access to a wider range of books.
- Leaders have not done enough to tackle the legacy of low standards in the school. COVID-19 has impacted further on gaps in pupils' knowledge. In mathematics, teachers in all year groups are having to revisit content from previous years. Many pupils need to catch up.
- Work has started on overhauling the curriculum, but leaders acknowledge that much more needs to be done to ensure that planning and teaching in all subjects is strong. Subject leaders are still developing their understanding of their role. Some have set out what should be taught when and in what order in their subject from Year 1 to Year 6. Teachers are beginning to get to grips with these new plans. They are checking what pupils have learned and remember. However, they are relying on tests which do not always link to what has been taught.
- There is little connection between the curriculum in early years and the rest of the school. Leaders lack clarity in identifying what knowledge children in Reception should be taught so that they are ready for key stage 1.
- The inclusion team has been strengthened. They work together well to support pupils' well-being. Leaders know what needs to be done to improve the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They are working currently to ensure that pupils' specific needs are identified earlier. Leaders are aware that staff need further training to understand the curriculum in order to be able to support pupils with SEND with their learning in class.
- Trustees and governors know the school's priorities but have been distracted by other business. They do not check thoroughly that improvements are being implemented and making a difference to pupils. They are not asking challenging questions to hold leaders to account for the quality of education. As a consequence, they have overestimated the school's improvement journey so far.
- Sensibly, leaders recognised that they needed external help to provide capacity to improve. The local authority is providing regular support to address some of the weaknesses in early years. Another trust has started to work with leaders. This is focused on developing leadership and improving the curriculum. It is too early to see the impact of this work.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, senior leaders, the chair of trustees and accounting officer, members of the local governing board (including the chair), pupils, staff, the director of primary education of the trust providing external support and representatives of the local authority early years team to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 41 free-text responses, and 29 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of trustees of the Community Schools Alliance Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Broadbridge
Her Majesty's Inspector