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26 April 2021

Elizabeth Gallagher  
Headteacher  
Elms Farm Community Primary School  
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Birmingham  
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Dear Mrs Gallagher

### **Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Elms Farm Community Primary School**

Following my remote inspection with Andrea Bedeau, 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 July 2017.

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:

- fully implement the intended curriculum in computing, modern foreign languages, and music
- equip governors to robustly assure themselves of the implementation of the revised wider curriculum.

### **Context**

- The headteacher is due to retire at the end of the spring term 2021, with the current deputy headteacher appointed as successor. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed to start at the beginning of the summer term. In September 2020, an existing member of staff was promoted to lead on the wider curriculum.
- Approximately seven out of 10 pupils were educated at home when the school closed to most pupils at the start of the spring term. Two thirds of pupils that the school deemed vulnerable attended on site, alongside all pupils meeting the Department for Education's definition of vulnerability. Half of all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) attended on site during this same period.
- At the time of this inspection all pupils had returned to school. Attendance was in line with pre-pandemic levels.

### **Main findings**

- All pupils have returned to school and are settling into their usual routines. An interim curriculum was being taught at the time of the inspection. This curriculum aims to support pupils' return to learning on site. This includes helping pupils to remember and practise the knowledge they studied while learning at home.
- Throughout the pandemic, leaders have prioritised curriculum development. The core subjects of English and mathematics are now implemented and consistent across the school. During the first national lockdown in March 2020, leaders began revising the wider curriculum. Subject leaders looked at the essential knowledge that they wanted pupils to learn. They created plans for all subjects, making it clear how they expect pupils' knowledge to build from year to year. For instance, in geography pupils learn about their local area before learning about their nearest cities and other cities in the United Kingdom.
- The implementation of the wider curriculum slowed due to the pandemic. This was because leaders gave priority to reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders also said that some subjects were more challenging to teach than others. For instance, in science, leaders explained that the practical content of

some units restricted what could be taught remotely. Leaders have planned to cover missed content in the summer term.

- Leaders have sourced new schemes of work for music, modern foreign languages, and computing. The third national lockdown delayed the launch of these schemes. Subject leaders now need to prioritise training teachers to implement the curriculum as intended in these areas.
- Leaders monitor what is taught in school and remotely. They also check that pupils are engaging with the work set. Teachers use low-stakes quizzes to assess whether pupils are remembering key knowledge. Leaders then decide which knowledge needs revisiting.
- A phonics programme is used consistently from Nursery through to Year 2. Leaders have created their own library of decodable books which enable pupils to read texts containing the sounds that they know. A rolling programme of training is in place, with the aim that all staff are experts in the teaching of reading.
- Leaders take effective actions to support vulnerable pupils and those with SEND. Therapies and support from external agencies have continued, albeit remotely. For instance, the educational psychologist continued with assessments to ensure that referrals were made without delay.
- Leaders prioritised the use of stories to help pupils understand the current circumstances. Some pupils, who have been in school throughout the recent restrictions, have found it difficult to adjust to all their peers returning. Pastoral support is available at lunchtimes to support pupils with social games. For the youngest children, support with concepts such as 'sharing' have needed reinforcing.
- Governors are well informed about the decisions made by leaders. Meetings have continued remotely, and the curriculum remains high priority on all agendas. Governors challenge leaders over the education provided, including education provided remotely. They question leaders about pupils' engagement with learning and attendance. This has resulted in a steady increase in pupils' participation over the pandemic. Governors need to assure themselves about the information shared around the implementation of the wider curriculum. They need to have a concrete plan in place to check this rather than solely accepting the information presented by leaders.
- Leaders have worked with a range of external agencies to develop their curriculum and education provision. As well as internally developing their own leaders and subject specialists, leaders have worked with national English and mathematics hubs to strengthen their curriculum offer. This has resulted in positive changes to the teaching of early reading, phonics, and mathematics.

- Input from the local authority has centred on supporting senior leaders with improving the curriculum. The local authority has brokered support from those with expertise in subject development. As a result, leaders have become better at reflecting on and evaluating what is and is not working in the curriculum.

## **Evidence**

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior 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 listened to pupils read and looked at minutes from governors' meetings and curriculum documentation. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 79 free-text responses, and 31 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 Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alison Colenso  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**