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Sheryl Slack
Executive Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Slack

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

Following my remote inspection with Claire Cropper, 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 one judgement of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in November 2018.

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:

- develop further curriculum plans in those subjects that do not sufficiently set out the most important knowledge that pupils should know and remember
- ensure that members of the governing body hold leaders to account fully for their actions to develop and improve the curriculum.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, there have been few changes to staffing. The leader for early years is currently seconded from a partner school. A new chair of governors and a parent governor have joined the governing body. Children can now be admitted into the Nursery Year at the age of two.
- During the spring term 2021, approximately half of all pupils spent some time accessing education at home. Just over two thirds of vulnerable pupils attended school regularly. This included most pupils with an education, health and care plan.
- At the time of this inspection, a small number of staff were absent due to COVID-19. You are deploying staff from within the school to minimise disruption to pupils' learning.

Main findings

- You have taken appropriate steps to ensure that all pupils have access to education. Leaders have ensured that staff have been trained appropriately to deliver remote education effectively. Pupils have engaged well with your remote education offer. Systems to deliver remote education are in place should pupils need to learn at home in the future. Whether learning at home or in school, pupils have had access to the same curriculum. The pupils that we spoke with have returned to school eager and ready to learn.
- Before the first national restrictions in March 2020, leaders had already begun to make sweeping changes to the school's curriculum. In most subjects, leaders had set out the knowledge that they wanted pupils to know and remember. In a small number of subjects, there is still some work to do to ensure that the knowledge that pupils need to learn is set out clearly.
- During the period when the school was only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions at the start of this term, pupils who were learning at home or at school continued to access the usual planned curriculum content. In mathematics and English, teachers delivered the curriculums without needing to make significant changes. In practical subjects such as science, teachers changed the order of learning so that pupils learning at home did not miss key learning.

- Upon the return of all pupils to school at the start of March 2021, teachers spent time finding out what pupils had forgotten of their previous learning. Subject leaders also identified aspects of the curriculum that had not been taught. This information is being used to adapt the current curriculum so that pupils can recap on prior learning. Improvements to the mathematics curriculum prior to the pandemic have stood everyone in good stead. Teachers' recent checks show that most pupils have retained their knowledge of number facts. Older pupils told us that their speed of recall of multiplication facts had improved.
- During the period when the school was only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions in spring 2021, younger pupils and children in the Reception Year continued to access daily phonics activities. Teachers have checked on how well pupils have retained their phonic knowledge. Pupils who have fallen behind are now receiving additional support to help them catch up quickly. Older pupils have benefited from daily reading sessions with their teacher. Since returning to school, pupils continue to develop their comprehension skills effectively and enjoy reading a wide range of literature.
- You and the governing body continue to prioritise the well-being and attendance of vulnerable pupils. During the last three months, you have been tenacious in encouraging them to attend school. Over this period the number of vulnerable pupils attending school has increased dramatically. These pupils have benefited from the effective support provided by staff.
- The special educational needs coordinator ensures that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive appropriate support. In recent months staff have kept in close contact with pupils with SEND to ensure they can keep up with their learning. Teachers are currently checking what pupils know and remember in reading, writing and mathematics. They will use this information to plan further support if needed.
- In regular discussions with you and other leaders, governors have ensured that the well-being and safety of staff and pupils have remained a priority. That said, governors recognise that the challenging circumstances over the last 12 months have limited their ability to fully hold subject leaders to account for curriculum developments.
- Leaders have benefited from effective support from the local authority and the Diocese of Lancaster. Subject leaders spoke positively about the support that they receive from leaders at the partner school. This support is enabling them to continue to improve their curriculum knowledge and leadership skills. The seconded leader for early years is driving forward improvements in the planning and delivery of the early years curriculum.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you and the head of school, a group of subject leaders, a member of the support staff, representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and of the Diocese of Lancaster to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also considered a range of documentation provided by you and other leaders, including curriculum plans, samples of pupils' work and minutes of governing body meetings. We spoke with a group of older pupils and observed a group of younger pupils read to a trusted adult. We spoke with a small number of parents and carers on the telephone. We looked at 37 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 21 free-text responses, and 21 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Garry White
Her Majesty's Inspector