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Dear Mrs Sennett

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Timothy Jenner, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 10 and 11 February 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.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, 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 three 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.

Context

- There have been significant staffing changes since the previous inspection. A new head of school took up post in September 2020. Three teachers left the school and three teachers have been appointed.
- Across the autumn term 2020, approximately one third of pupils were educated remotely for a period of time. Pupils in Years 2, 5 and 6 were affected more than others due to 'bubble' closures.
- At the time of this inspection, three quarters of pupils were being educated at home. All pupils with an education, health and care plan and almost half of those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were receiving education in school. Just over half of vulnerable pupils were being educated on site.

Main findings

- Leaders and those responsible for governance ensure that all pupils receive education whether they are learning at home or on site. Parents express positive views of the action you have taken and the support they are offered. A blend of live and recorded teaching supports those learning from home. Pupils have access to online resources, paper-based packs of work, electronic devices and the internet where needed.
- You were refining your curriculum prior to the partial closure of schools on 23 March 2020. COVID-19 restrictions and changes in staffing hampered developments. You are getting back on track, but work is further ahead in some subjects than in others. In mathematics, planning is precise and starts with the early years. Leaders have spelled out clearly what pupils are expected to know, do and remember, and by when. In subjects such as history and geography, however, content and important knowledge are not so well defined or sequenced.
- Leaders ensure that pupils who are being educated on site learn the same things as those at home. Staff make sure that pupils have the equipment they need to engage in tasks whether in school or at home. For example, mouldable dough and ribbons motivated some Nursery children to engage with learning online. Number lines and whiteboards supported others. One parent commented that staff, 'have been amazing during this pandemic, ensuring the children are all happy and still able to learn'.
- Extra support is offered to pupils who fall behind or need more practice. This includes pupils with SEND. The special educational needs coordinator works closely with staff to make sure that learning in the current circumstances meets pupils' needs.

- Vulnerable pupils and families are getting the right support at the right time. Staff talk daily with those learning from home. They draw on external agencies, such as social work colleagues, when needs arise.
- Reading is prioritised. Story time is a favourite part of the day for staff and pupils. Pupils can access books to read online. Text extracts are readily available. Phonics is taught at least once a day in early years and key stage 1. Teachers model how to say letter sounds correctly in live and recorded lessons. They demonstrate how to blend and segment sounds. Some aspects of the reading curriculum, however, could be better. Leaders' approach to phonics is not made clear on the school's website. Teachers in key stage 2 need training in early reading and phonics so that they can more effectively help pupils who need additional support. Currently, pupils do not take decodable books home to practise their reading. They can, however, read decodable books online.
- Governors visit the school virtually on a regular basis and have kept the welfare and workload of staff firmly in their sights. Staff are grateful for the support and kindness that governors offer. Governors know how education is currently being provided. Recently, governors have looked at the substance of education more closely. They are starting to probe more deeply into the reports and responses that leaders offer about the curriculum. You welcome governors' increased focus on the quality of education that you are providing.
- You have appreciated the support and challenge from partners within the trust, including the newly appointed chief executive officer (CEO). Joint training opportunities, including the trust's remote education network, have supported curriculum developments and developed staff expertise.
- You draw on the support of external partners, such as the local authority. Subject leaders engage regularly with experts in subject associations and curriculum hubs. You, as executive headteacher of both schools, ensure that staff share good practice with the staff in the other local primary school. Staff's confidence and subject expertise are being developed through these means.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, the multi-academy trust's CEO, 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 made some visits to lessons remotely. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 14 free-text responses, and 17 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Enhance Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector