

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



24 March 2021

Julie Paisley
Headteacher
St Michael's CofE Primary School
Carlisle Road
Dalston
Cumbria
CA5 7LN

Dear Mrs Paisley

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Michael's CofE Primary School

Following my remote inspection with John Donald, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 4 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.

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 two successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in February 2020.

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.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- Ensure that teachers are trained to use the assessment information that they have to better support the learning of those pupils who have recently been removed from the SEND register.

Context

- No key staff or governors have either left or joined the school since its last inspection. However, you have tendered your resignation and will leave the school at the end of the autumn term 2021.
- During the autumn term 2020, a small proportion of pupils had to work from home for a short period of time because of COVID-19.
- At the time of this inspection, around nine tenths of pupils were learning at home. One third of vulnerable pupils were in school as were one eighth of pupils with education, health and care plans.

Main findings

- Since the pandemic began, you have focused on developing the school's curriculum, including the remote learning offer. You carefully monitor the quality of the curriculum which pupils receive in school as well as at home. This has resulted in a consistent approach to curriculum delivery across the school. You have ensured that the online system used by most pupils is easy to navigate. Parents and carers are delighted with the actions that you have taken to ensure their children are receiving an effective education in the current circumstances.
- Over recent months, leaders have embedded improvements in the mathematics curriculum. Mathematics plans now build on children's learning from the Reception Year. Leaders have also refined the curriculum in the early years. Children now have more opportunities to develop their language and communication skills. Consequently, children are better prepared for the Year 1 curriculum.
- Many subject leaders are new to their roles. COVID-19 restrictions have slowed your plans to develop their expertise in leading their subjects. Leaders have prioritised redesigning the curriculum in science and the foundation subjects. Each subject now has 'big ideas' that underpin what leaders want pupils to know. Subject leaders have planned the knowledge that pupils will learn, and when they will learn it. This work is further along in subjects such as science than in others.
- The teaching of reading has remained a high priority throughout the third national lockdown. This is true for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and vulnerable pupils. You have placed a strong emphasis on staff training. Staff now have greater expertise in teaching early reading. This is

supporting their increasing expertise in supporting older pupils to become fluent readers. Teaching assistants are also trained to deliver high-quality individualised support. This means that pupils benefit from support when learning at home and in school.

- Teachers continue to read to pupils regularly. Reading resources have been carefully chosen to enthuse pupils at home. For instance, all pupils received a poetry scroll through the post. These actions have maintained a culture of reading throughout the pandemic.
- Pupils with SEND have access to the same curriculum as all other pupils. Their learning is further supported by carefully laid out plans to support their individual needs. This ensures that the needs of pupils with SEND working from home, as well as those in school, continue to be met.
- Recently, you have changed the way that pupils' special educational needs are identified. This has led to a reduction in the number of pupils on the school's SEND register. Assessment procedures in English and mathematics provide teachers with information about pupils' needs, but teachers do not always use this information purposefully. This is especially true for those pupils that have recently been removed from the SEND register. Training has not equipped teachers to overcome the gaps that these pupils still have in their learning.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the impact that COVID-19 has had on staff and pupils. They prioritise staff and pupils' well-being as a result. Governors are also aware of the school's improvement priorities. They know how the curriculum has been developed and what remains to do. Governors carry out checks on the school's remote education offer. They use current research into best practice to inform their work in this area. Consequently, governors have assured themselves of the quality of the curriculum currently on offer to all pupils, including those with SEND and those who are vulnerable.
- The local authority and the diocese have continued to support you and staff throughout the pandemic. Both know the school very well. The local authority has supported and challenged leaders in the design of their curriculum. The diocese has continued to provide pastoral and well-being support to staff and school leaders. Leaders welcome the support that is offered. It has helped them take appropriate actions to provide continuing education in the current circumstances.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, middle leaders, representatives from the local authority and diocese,

governors and pupils to discuss the actions taken to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We looked at a wide range of documentation, including minutes of meetings of the governing body and of local authority strategic improvement meetings. We heard pupils from Years 1, 2 and 3 read to a trusted adult and observed a sample of pupils' remote learning. We also looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 47 free-text responses, and 28 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Jackie Stillings
Her Majesty's Inspector