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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Rachel Hocking
Headteacher
Swalwell Primary School
South View Terrace
Swalwell
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE16 3HZ

Dear Mrs Hocking

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Swalwell Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Mark Smith, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 25 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 two 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.

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

- ensure that subjects other than English and mathematics are planned and sequenced coherently.

Context

- The headteacher took up her post in September 2019. The two assistant headteachers who were previously acting in the role of headteacher returned to their substantive roles and remain in post. Two teachers have left the school since the previous inspection. There have been no changes to the governing body.
- In the autumn term 2020, a small proportion of individual pupils were educated remotely for short periods when they were isolating. There were no year-group or class 'bubble' closures.
- Currently, two thirds of pupils with education, health and care plans are attending on site. At the time of this inspection, over half of all vulnerable pupils were in school.

Main findings

- The headteacher has brought stability to the school. Staff are united in their ambition to develop the curriculum and raise standards. Over the past year, leaders have prioritised reading, including phonics, as well as writing and mathematics. They have ensured consistency in how these subjects are planned and taught.
- However, leaders have not looked at the other subjects in the same level of detail. Although pupils are studying the full range of subjects, leaders now need to ensure that subjects other than English and mathematics are planned and sequenced coherently.
- Leaders, including governors, make sure that pupils receive education in the current circumstances. They have established a programme of remote education. Staff expect all pupils, whether they are learning in school or at home, to engage in their learning and do well. Staff replicate what happens in the classroom for those who are learning at home. This works particularly well in phonics for pupils in the early years and Years 1 and 2.
- In some subjects, leaders have adjusted the order in which content is taught so teachers can deliver it remotely. Leaders keep an eye on these adjustments. They have a sensible plan in place to tackle any gaps in pupils' learning when all pupils return to school.
- Parents and carers are extremely positive about the changes that have taken place over the past year. They are grateful for the part that leaders and teachers have played in supporting them with the challenges they have faced as a result of the pandemic.

- Teachers make sure that the children of key workers and the vulnerable pupils that are in school continue to receive the support and interventions they need. Lessons for these pupils continue as normal. Teachers also provide additional phonics sessions each day for pupils who need to catch up. While most of the vulnerable pupils are currently in school, some are at home. Leaders, teachers and the newly appointed family support worker give these families the help they need.
- Leaders have continued to work alongside specialist teachers. They make sure that pupils with physical disabilities and those with visual or hearing impairments have access to the support and equipment they need. Teachers, specialists and therapists all contribute to the school's online learning platform. This supports and encourages pupils to meet their individual targets. Teachers continue to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of individual pupils who are learning at home. For example, teachers provide key texts in Braille.
- Governors have improved their knowledge and skills over the past year. They hold leaders to account for what happens in school. Last year, in addition to their other responsibilities, governors joined either the English or the mathematics teams in school. This enabled them to find out for themselves the impact of the new curriculum in these subjects. Governors meet regularly with the headteacher to ensure the remote education offer is working well. Governors are keen for the school to become a resource for the close community which it serves. They challenge leaders to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported.
- Leaders and governors place great emphasis on staff's workload and well-being. Staff notice this and feel well supported by leaders. They know the part they play in improving the school. Staff like the way they are included in whole-school decisions. Leaders lead by example and staff appreciate this.
- The local authority has supported the school by providing training for subject leaders and governors. The local authority holds senior leaders and governors to account for the quality of education. The school has also benefited from the support of a local English hub in developing its phonics programme.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, a representative of the local authority and members of the governing body to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also spoke with pupils, heard them read and looked at the school's online learning platform. We spoke with teachers and teaching assistants. We looked at a range of documentation related to the curriculum and remote education. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 33 free-text responses, and 20 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 Gateshead. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gary Rawlings
Her Majesty's Inspector