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Dear Miss Williams

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Pennyhill Primary School

Following my remote inspection with Heather Phillips, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 23 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 March 2018.

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:

- continue to review and develop the curriculum in the remaining foundation subjects so that pupils' knowledge, skills and vocabulary build over time.

Context

- Since your most recent monitoring inspection, one governor has left, and two new governors have joined the governing body.
- In the autumn term 2020, approximately one third of pupils spent some time being educated remotely because of COVID-19 related issues.
- The school was only open to vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers at the time of the inspection. Just over three quarters of pupils were learning remotely, and the remainder were attending school. Three quarters of vulnerable pupils and just under half of pupils with education, health and care plans were attending school at the time of the inspection.
- Six members of staff were absent at the time of the inspection. These absences were all related to COVID-19. Leaders have been able to cover these absences internally.

Main findings

- School leaders have reviewed and introduced curriculum plans in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Leaders aim to create a curriculum that builds pupils' knowledge, skills and vocabulary over time in all subjects. Leaders plan to review and develop the remaining foundation subjects in a staggered manner. COVID-19 restrictions have delayed leaders' plans.
- Leaders have transferred the usual curriculum to a remote education offer. They make sure that pupils working from home and in school receive a suitable education. Teachers upload work to an online platform daily. This is backed up by emails and work packs if parents request these. Teachers provide guidance on how to structure the day's learning, but pupils have the option to work at their own pace and at a time that suits their family circumstances. Teachers provide feedback to pupils, but if families return work in a paper format, feedback is delayed. Pupils in school access similar learning as pupils who are learning at home. This is important because some pupils do a mixture of home learning and attending school. Pupils in school are supported within their year group bubble by a teacher and teaching assistants. Senior leaders check the quality of the remote learning offer. Teachers have reordered some areas of the curriculum because they would prefer to teach some lessons face to face. In many subjects, including science

and mathematics, teachers have had to make changes because some pupils do not have the required practical resources while learning at home.

- The majority of vulnerable pupils are attending school. Leaders, staff and external agencies work closely with pupils and their families if this is not the case. If pupils are not engaging with the remote learning, staff and leaders contact their families. Staff offer additional support when required. Electronic devices have been loaned to many families.
- Teachers and support staff in the Reception and Year 1 classes have made phonics teaching a priority. Pupils in school and at home continue with their daily phonics lessons. If pupils working at home are struggling with their phonics work, staff provide them with additional support. Teachers allocate online reading books to all pupils. There is also the option for parents to collect reading books from the school building if their child is learning at home.
- Leaders state that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are set work that is matched to their ability. We saw work provided for some pupils with SEND which supports this. Teachers have also adapted work for pupils with SEND following feedback received from the pupils' families. Leaders rightly pride themselves on the level of communication that they maintain with the families of pupils with SEND. Leaders hold multi-agency meetings through videoconferencing. Support from external agencies continues to be accessed.
- Those responsible for governance are pleased with how quickly staff and pupils have adapted to the new way of learning. They are keen for there to be as little disruption to pupils' education as possible. Over the last year, governors have focused their efforts on the school's remote learning offer, staff well-being and other COVID-19 related issues. They have done this remotely. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's remote education offer. They provide appropriate support and challenge.
- The local authority supports the school in a variety of ways. This includes termly visits and facilitating the sharing of good practice among schools. This has benefited Pennyhill. For example, the local authority supported the school to put in place the remote education package, and they recently completed a review of its effectiveness. The local authority state that the school has strong leadership and a stable governing body.

Evidence

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

We looked at a range of lessons and activities in the remote education offer. We also looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 31 free-text responses, and 49 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 Sandwell local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wayne Simner
Her Majesty's Inspector