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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Jon Barr and Debbie Fisher
Co-Headteachers
St Barnabas Church of England VC Primary School
Albany Road
Bristol
BS6 5LQ

Dear Mr Barr and Mrs Fisher

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Barnabas Church of England VC Primary School

Following my remote inspection 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. 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 (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:

- identify the important knowledge and skills pupils need at each stage of their learning in subjects in the wider curriculum.

Context

- The leadership structure in the school changed in September 2020. There are now two headteachers who co-lead the school. Several governors have joined the school, including a new foundation governor.
- Approximately 60% of pupils were educated at home when the school was closed to most pupils at the start of the spring term. Almost 80% of vulnerable pupils and those with special educational and/or disabilities were attending on site.
- At the time of this inspection, 97% of pupils were attending on site.

Main findings

- Since the last inspection, you and other leaders got off to a quick start to bring about necessary improvements to the quality of education. Your clear direction is ensuring that pupils receive a suitable education in the current circumstances.
- During the summer term 2020, you and other leaders carefully refined the wider curriculum. A comprehensive plan is in place for the rest of the academic year. In science, history and geography, curriculum leaders have created well-sequenced plans. They identify the important knowledge and skills pupils need to learn. However, you recognise that plans for some subjects, such as music, are in their infancy.
- Your focus on improving pupils' language and communication skills is beginning to have an impact. Staff are trained well in using the school's agreed approach. For example, in English and mathematics, adults show pupils how to craft sentences to explain their thinking. As a result, pupils' mathematical reasoning skills and vocabulary are improving.
- In September 2020, you made effective improvements to the reading curriculum, including the teaching of phonics. Notably, a 'reading rock stars' challenge is promoting a positive reading culture at school and home. Pupils are enthusiastic when discussing their favourite authors. You have identified that some pupils need extra support to help them understand the books they read. Teachers are adjusting their curriculum plans to make this happen. This is enabling more pupils to catch up, especially those who speak English as an additional language.

- You strengthened the remote learning offer considerably in January 2021. You worked with local businesses to secure electronic devices for pupils. As a result, pupils' participation in learning increased from the first national lockdown. Many parents comment favourably about the school's work. They say staff 'have gone above and beyond' to support pupils and the community. The school is well placed should you need to return to remote learning in the future.
- Since pupils returned to school in March 2021, you have prioritised their well-being. A daily focus on 'healthy me' and 'shine rules' is helping pupils to return to routines and become responsible learners. Pupils say this is working.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) provides strong leadership. Well-trained staff ensure that pupils' pastoral and academic needs are accurately identified. Pupils' individual targets are precise and regularly reviewed. The SENCo draws on specialist help to support pupils with the most complex social and emotional needs.
- Governors know the school well. They have a solid understanding of the systems in place to provide education to the most vulnerable pupils. During the pandemic, governors carried on their work remotely. They ask challenging questions to assure themselves that pupils are making expected progress in English and mathematics. Governors recognise that they need to deepen their understanding of the wider curriculum. Plans are in place to make this happen.
- You welcome and benefit from ambitious external support. Work with the school improvement officer has been pivotal in strengthening the school's curriculum. Local English and mathematics hubs are improving teachers' subject knowledge. For example, staff have received training in the teaching of early reading and, now, there is a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. Staff value the support they receive.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. I spoke to you, subject leaders, three governors, the SENCo and the school improvement officer to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

I reviewed documents provided by the school, including governors' minutes and curriculum plans. I talked to a group of pupils and listened to some pupils read. I looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including five free-text responses, and 19 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Dale Burr
Her Majesty's Inspector