

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Andrew Rannard
Headteacher
De La Salle School
Mill Brow
Eccleston
St Helens
Merseyside
WA10 4QH

Dear Mr Rannard

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of De La Salle School

Following my remote inspection with Stephen Bentham, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 30 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 had 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:

- develop teachers' knowledge of phonics so that they can support pupils who need additional help to become fluent and confident readers.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, two deputy headteachers have temporarily been seconded to other schools. Four teachers have left the school.
- Three members of staff have been temporarily promoted onto the senior leadership team. This includes: an acting deputy headteacher; an acting assistant headteacher and an acting lead practitioner. Three other members of staff have taken up temporary leadership roles on the pastoral team. Four teachers have joined the school.
- In the spring term 2021, prior to the school re-opening to all pupils, approximately nine tenths of pupils were educated at home. During the same period, just under one third of vulnerable pupils, and approximately one fifth of pupils with an education, health and care plan, attended school.
- At the time of this inspection, almost all pupils were attending school. A small proportion of pupils were self-isolating. A very small number of pupils were initially reluctant to return to school. They are now attending school after discussion with leaders.

Main findings

- When the pandemic began, you quickly provided electronic devices so that all pupils had equal access to learning when studying remotely. In the months that followed, you ensured that staff were knowledgeable about the systems and approaches required to deliver the online curriculum successfully. As such, teachers can seamlessly switch between online and in-school curriculum delivery, as required. For example, pupils currently self-isolating at home study the same curriculum as their peers. Consequently, pupils have continued to receive an education in these difficult times.
- In the last 12 months, you and other leaders quickly tackled the lack of breadth and ambition that was evident in some subject curriculums. You secured an external consultant to provide curriculum advice and guidance. As a result, you made appropriate changes to the curriculum, which are benefiting current pupils' learning, particularly in key stage 3. Nevertheless, you have identified that some subject curriculums require further development.
- Since the pandemic began, subject leaders have carefully amended the order in which some topics are taught. Leaders have also modified how they teach certain subject content. For example, in geography, teachers have developed a virtual fieldwork project. This was to enable pupils to demonstrate their knowledge of fieldwork techniques.

- In recent weeks, teachers have made additional checks to identify what pupils know and can remember from their previous learning. Since the school reopened to all pupils, leaders are successfully getting pupils back on track with their learning.
- In Year 7, teachers' checks have revealed that pupils have a variety of missing subject knowledge. Teachers are working effectively with Year 7 pupils to find out which aspects of the primary curriculum have been missed or forgotten from the summer term 2020.
- You recognise the importance of ensuring that pupils are confident readers. Prior to the national restrictions, you had a plan in place to extend teachers' knowledge of phonics. However, this work has been partially delayed by the pandemic. Added to this, when pupils returned in the autumn term 2020, staff identified a higher than usual number of Year 7 pupils who are behind with their reading. To date, staff have not had the training that they need to enable them to accurately identify the weaknesses in pupils' phonic knowledge. This means that some teachers are not adept in supporting pupils who struggle the most with reading.
- Year 11 teachers are successfully determining whether pupils are struggling to recall key knowledge and they are correcting any misunderstandings. Teachers have provided Year 11 pupils with curriculum time to revisit and embed important subject content. This work is effective in helping pupils to prepare for their next stage in education, employment, and training.
- Leaders have a clear oversight of vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff make regular contact with these pupils and their families. Accordingly, if issues arise, leaders make sure that help is given from suitably skilled professionals. Aside from this, pupils with SEND benefit from the expertise of teaching assistants. Guided by the special educational needs coordinator, teaching assistants appropriately adapt some subject resources for pupils with SEND. This helps these pupils to learn well in class and remotely.
- Throughout the pandemic, members of the governing body have kept in regular contact with you. Governors know the school well. They provide effective challenge and guidance to you and other leaders. In the last 12 months, governors have not allowed the pace of their work to slow. They have remained focused on the long-term school improvement priorities. As such, they are resolute in their determination to strengthen further the education for pupils at De La Salle School.
- The local authority continues to provide support and challenge to the school. The Archdiocese of Liverpool has supported leaders to improve their curriculum plans. Consequently, pupils' education is broader and richer than it was before.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke with you, other senior leaders, members of the governing body and representatives of the Archdiocese of Liverpool and of the local authority. We also spoke with the school improvement partner. We met with subject leaders, members of the teaching staff, two teaching assistants and two groups of pupils. This was to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We looked at the minutes of the full governing body meetings and other documentation provided by the school. This included a selection of curriculum plans and examples of the education provided to pupils when they were learning remotely. We looked at the 176 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the 167 free-text responses. We also reviewed the 105 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

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

Yours sincerely

Alyson Middlemass
Her Majesty's Inspector