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Mark Kingswood
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Dear Mr Kingswood

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Fernhill School

Following my remote inspection with Maxine McDonald-Taylor, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 3 and 4 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 at its previous section 5 inspections. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in September 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.

Context

- Since the last monitoring inspection in January 2020, 11 members of teaching and support staff have left the school and nine have been appointed. Two members have left the governing body and one new governor has been appointed.
- During the autumn term in 2020, just over half of the pupils worked from home for at least one period of self-isolation. Nearly all pupils in Year 9 had to work from home on more than one occasion.
- At the time of this inspection, nearly 90% of all pupils were being educated at home, with the remaining pupils attending on site. Nearly half of the school's vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were being educated on site.
- A very small number of staff are absent or have left the school as a result of COVID-19. Their classes are being covered by senior staff.

Main findings

- School leaders, staff and governors have wholeheartedly focused on providing a full education for all pupils in the current circumstances. Lessons learned from earlier lockdowns enabled leaders to identify what helps pupils to work from home or on site.
- By the start of the pandemic, leaders had drawn up ambitious curriculum plans. Findings from the monitoring inspection in January 2020 focused leaders' plans to broaden the curriculum and ensure that all staff have high aspirations for pupils with SEND.
- Leaders have continued to develop their curriculum during the pandemic, although some plans have been delayed. For example, leaders had planned educational visits to give pupils more intensive and relevant practice in languages. These visits have been postponed until restrictions are lifted.
- In nearly all subjects, pupils working from home and on the school site are following what teachers planned for them pre-pandemic. With indomitable determination, teachers have worked creatively to find solutions to the challenges of remote education. Sometimes adjustments have had to be made to ensure that the right content is delivered in the right order. For English work, teachers have carefully reviewed how materials are presented. In this way, pupils working online can access everything they need easily, rather than having to manage lots of different resources. Leaders make sure that pupils have suitable devices and internet access to complete their work at home. They have also delivered essential stationery and musical instruments to pupils who need them.

- Leaders and teachers have been quick to respond to pupils' levels of engagement. For example, in science Year 9 pupils were struggling to work through the planned chemistry content. Science staff reviewed their plans and switched to biology instead. Pupils' engagement and the quality of their work quickly improved. Pupils will catch up with their chemistry work when they return to on-site lessons. Similarly, mathematics staff have noted that pupils are not developing fluent mental mathematics. Some pupils have ended up relying too much on their calculators. Teachers are sensibly planning to focus on mental mathematics and times tables when all pupils return to school.
- Year 11 pupils are working with purpose and productivity and there is no doubt that some are feeling the pressure. School leaders are keeping a close eye on pupils' well-being, while maintaining the high expectations they have worked so hard to raise.
- For pupils struggling with reading, existing programmes of extra help have been adapted for online working, in and out of school. Teaching assistants hear pupils read, respond to their specific difficulties and help them progress. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 continue to have their regular library lessons and enjoy a wide range of digital books and online reading tasks.
- With support and guidance from the local authority, teachers' planning for pupils with SEND is improving. Teachers consider pupils' needs when planning tasks. Explanations are clear and enough time is allowed for repeated practice. The school's approach to remote education has helped many pupils with SEND to thrive. They feel confident about asking for help from the online 'chat' area and can get personalised attention. One teacher commented that they could virtually 'speak in the ear' of a pupil, while they are working, resulting in better concentration and progress.
- Since the last monitoring inspection, governors have begun to challenge school leaders more stringently. Governors know their own strengths and weaknesses. They also make it their business to know exactly what is happening in the school at the moment, including how remote education is progressing.
- Fernhill is a high-priority school for Hampshire local authority. It is encouraging that high levels of support have been sustained throughout the pandemic. Advisers are rightly supporting improvements in provision for pupils with SEND and developing new heads of department into strong leaders of their subjects.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leadership team, groups of staff, pupils, governors and two local

authority advisers to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

Inspectors also considered a range of curriculum materials, including extracts from recorded live lessons with pupils' responses and examples of lesson resources. We reviewed 43 responses to the staff survey. Comments submitted by 49 parents, as part of Ofsted Parent View, were also taken into account.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector