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Michael Stoppard
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Dear Mr Stoppard

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of The Hereford Academy

Following my remote inspection with Chris Stevens, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 27 and 28 January 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 special measures.

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 was judged to require special measures at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in November 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 school's last monitoring inspection in October 2019, three assistant headteachers have joined the school. One is now the special educational needs coordinator. There are new curriculum leaders for mathematics and design technology. There has been one change of governor on the local academy board (LAB).
- Much of the school's governance is still carried out by the strategic task group (STG). This group comprises: a member of the trust board; the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Diocese of Hereford Multi-Academy Trust (DHMAT); the chair of the LAB and the CEO of the Talentum Learning Trust, who is supporting the school. The LAB will take over governance functions from the STG in due course.
- Across the autumn term 2020, approximately 35% of pupils had to be educated remotely at some time.
- At the time of the inspection, 90% of pupils were being educated at home. Three-quarters of vulnerable pupils were in school and one quarter were at home. One third of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were in school and two-thirds were at home.
- At the time of the inspection, 11 members of staff were isolating.

Main findings

- You and your staff are successfully providing education for pupils in the current circumstances. You have worked hard to ensure that all pupils have the equipment they need to be able to work at home. For example, you have provided many families with a laptop and internet access. Teachers provide interesting work, using a varied range of resources. They explain new content well. They provide opportunities for pupils to ask questions. They give regular feedback on the work that pupils complete.
- Teachers check that pupils are completing the work they have been set. Whenever a pupil appears to be failing to engage with their work, staff get in touch with their family and offer extra support and encouragement. As a result, you are quick to intervene and support pupils who are not engaging well with remote education.
- Staff across the school have been working hard to develop the curriculum since the last monitoring inspection. You have carried this work on at pace, throughout the pandemic. All pupils now study an appropriate, broad range of subjects. Curriculum leaders and staff have ensured that subject content is appropriately challenging. They have also thought carefully about the order in which content is taught so that pupils' knowledge builds.

- Your intention has been for pupils, as far as possible, to follow their usual curriculum whether they are in school or working at home. You have been successful in this. Teachers adapt thoughtfully how they present subject content to better engage pupils in their learning when they are at home. For example, in science, teachers use online resources to simulate experiments. In music, pupils practise their keyboard skills using an online piano keyboard. Pupils told us that they enjoy most of their remote learning.
- Most vulnerable pupils study in school. They follow the same curriculum as their peers and are supported well by staff. Staff work hard to support vulnerable pupils who are working at home. Staff keep in regular touch with these pupils and their families. They offer extra help when it is needed.
- You have high expectations of pupils in Year 11. Their curriculum is the same as if they were studying towards examinations in the summer. One pupil told us, 'The teachers have insisted we follow our courses'. You are determined that these pupils should be well prepared for their next steps when they complete Year 11.
- Pupils with SEND are supported well, especially when they are in school where staff are on hand to provide help whenever it is needed. You would like more of these pupils to attend school, particularly those with education, health and care plans. You are encouraging parents to send their children to school and are having some success in doing so.
- You have maintained a strong focus on reading across all years. You expect all pupils to read regularly and you provide pupils with access to a wide range of online books. You have carried on additional support for pupils who struggle with reading. You encourage these pupils to attend school where they are provided with one-to-one or small-group support. When working at home, you provide these pupils with targeted online resources designed to help with their reading.
- Members of the STG and LAB have a good understanding of the actions that leaders are taking to ensure that pupils receive education at this time. They support and challenge leaders well. They are contributing very effectively to the school's work.
- As the school's leadership capacity has grown and improved since the last monitoring inspection, its use of external support has reduced steadily. For example, the great majority of curriculum development has been carried out by curriculum leaders and teachers, supported by senior leaders. The Talentum Learning Trust continues to provide support in preparing the LAB to take over the school's governance and in further developing curriculum leadership. This support is proving successful.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, curriculum leaders, teachers, two groups of pupils and members of the STG, including the CEO of the DHMAT and the chair of the LAB, to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also scrutinised curriculum plans, and resources provided for pupils' education. An inspector 'visited' an online live lesson.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the DHMAT, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Herefordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector