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Ruston Atkinson
Principal
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Dear Mr Atkinson

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of NCEA Duke's Secondary School

Following my remote inspection with Rachel Tordoff, 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 have serious weaknesses.

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 have serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. The school was last inspected in March 2020.

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

- You were appointed as principal in March 2020. A new deputy principal and assistant principal are now also in position.
- In the autumn term 2020, over three quarters of pupils experienced periods of remote education because of COVID-19. This includes students in the sixth form.
- At the time of this inspection, about 95% of all pupils were being educated at home. Almost all pupils who are vulnerable and almost all pupils with an education, health and care plan are attending on site.

Main findings

- The passion and dedication that you and your staff have for your pupils is clear. You act with integrity and care. You are committed to serving the local community. This has continued at this time of national lockdown. You have made sure that both on-site and remote education are available to pupils.
- You have been developing the curriculum since the time of the previous inspection. You have been working to improve the transition between primary schools and Year 7 so that pupils build on their knowledge step by step. You have been making sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who need to improve their literacy receive the support that they need. You have also developed the curriculum that pupils with additional social and emotional needs receive.
- Curriculum plans include many opportunities for pupils to 'dig deep' in their minds to remember information that they have been taught before. Curriculum leaders have reviewed the content of their subjects to check that it is taught in a logical way. You are aware that some subjects are further developed than others and you are addressing this.
- You are undeterred by the extra challenges that COVID-19 restrictions have brought. You have taken effective steps to ensure that pupils can continue to access the curriculum both in school and when they are learning from home. Your remote education offer has been well considered. A blended approach is in place. This includes both recorded lessons and live lessons. Your teachers use different ways of checking how well pupils are remembering information. Where needed, you have altered curriculum plans in light of the high percentage of pupils currently studying remotely.
- When pupils returned to school in September 2020, curriculum leaders thought carefully about how to help pupils catch up after previous COVID-19 restrictions. With an eye to national changes, you are putting plans in place to prioritise the most important elements of each subject to ensure that students can successfully complete their studies. You are also balancing the need for

pupils to leave school with a portfolio of qualifications that will support their next steps. This includes students in the sixth form.

- Vulnerable pupils and others attending education on site access a similar curriculum to those at home. They are supported by teachers and teaching assistants during the school day. All pupils have access to advice from teachers, whether they are at home or at school.
- You have made sure that there is a focus on helping those pupils who struggle to read. Pupils sit assessments that pinpoint their specific needs when they start school. Additional support is then offered that is matched to pupils' needs. You have strategies in place to continue this support if pupils are studying from home.
- 'Pupil passports', that describe any extra strategies that would benefit pupils with SEND, are in place. You have shared specific online resources with parents of pupils with SEND to further support them if they are studying from home.
- The academy improvement board, diocese and local authority are working together to support school leaders. There is a striking desire to ensure that there is not a 'scattergun approach' to helping the school to improve. Prioritising changes and doing 'a few things well' are at the heart of their support and advice. Changes to curriculum plans are an example of this.
- Even in these current circumstances, you are striving to ensure that the school improves. You and your team want to give pupils the best possible chance for the future. You are increasingly successful in this.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with the principal and deputy principal, members of the senior leadership team, and three curriculum leaders. We also spoke to a group of pupils and a group of staff. We had discussions with the special educational needs coordinator and members of staff responsible for pastoral support. We held meetings with the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, members of the academy improvement board and representatives from both the local authority and the diocese to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We reviewed example remote lessons, looked at curriculum plans and at other documentation provided by school leaders. We sampled pupils' work. We considered the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey that allows parents to give their views about their child's school, in addition to responses to surveys that leaders had organised about remote education.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle
Her Majesty's Inspector