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2 March 2021

Steve Fox
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Dear Mr Fox

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Ardley Hill Academy

Following my remote inspection with Katherine Douglas, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 10 and 11 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in April 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.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- ensure that the school's curriculum plans consider in depth the specific knowledge that pupils need to learn in each year group, and that teachers are well trained and confident to deliver these aspects of the plans in all subjects.

Context

- Since the monitoring inspection in March 2019, the school has joined the Chiltern Learning Trust. Prior to your arrival in April 2020, there was an interim headteacher in post for a term. An assistant headteacher joined the school at the same time as you and is currently in the role of interim deputy headteacher.
- During the autumn term 2020, all pupils had at least one period of remote education. Pupils in early years and Years 1 and 2 were affected more than other year groups due to repeated periods of isolation.
- Around three quarters of all pupils are currently learning remotely. Two thirds of vulnerable pupils and the same proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are working from home. Approximately three quarters of pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHC) are attending school for their lessons.

Main findings

- Leaders were well placed to provide remote education to pupils in January 2021. They had developed plans for pupils learning at home during autumn term which built upon the work leaders had done during the first national lockdown. You and other leaders have made sure that all pupils have access to all the appropriate resources that they need, including laptops and the internet. This is ensuring that leaders are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances.
- Throughout the pandemic, leaders have thought carefully about ways to improve pupils' experiences when they are learning at home. The ways that staff, parents and pupils communicate and provide feedback have evolved over time. As a result, pupils are increasingly engaged with their learning, even when this is delivered remotely. They are completing and submitting increased amounts of better-quality work. Parents appreciate the guidance they are receiving to help them support their children at home.
- Whether learning at home or in school, the youngest children and pupils continue to have daily phonics sessions. Where there is a risk of pupils falling behind or where pupils need help to catch up, appropriate support is in place. If pupils are struggling with reading at home, teachers encourage pupils to attend school so they have face-to-face support from trained staff who can help them.

- Leaders continue to promote a love of reading across the whole school. There is a strong emphasis on sharing books, and pupils being able to show that they understand what they are reading. Staff make sure that a range of texts is available for pupils to practise their reading at home.
- Remote education in mathematics closely follows the school's chosen curriculum, which was introduced in September 2020. Staff have received initial training to teach this. They are providing supplementary resources to help pupils deepen their mathematical understanding and correct pupils' misconceptions.
- Leaders have established 'learning journeys' in all subjects across the curriculum. These are long-term plans that support teachers to think about what pupils need to learn in each year group. However, plans do not yet consider the specific knowledge that each subject needs to cover. Teachers' work to develop and understand these plans is still ongoing. Leaders' plans to embed this more speedily has been hampered by other work that has taken greater priority during COVID-19.
- You and the deputy headteacher have thought carefully about how best to support vulnerable pupils. Staff consider what is right for these pupils both in terms of their education and ensuring support is in place for their personal, social and emotional well-being. Regular communication between school and families ensures that the needs of vulnerable pupils are met.
- The new team for pupils with SEND has introduced systems to check pupils are getting the support they need, including those pupils who attend the resource provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. While most pupils who have an EHC plan are in school, for those pupils learning at home, staff find ways of adapting remote learning so that all pupils with SEND can participate fully. This is building pupils' confidence in what they can achieve.
- Governors are determined in their efforts to check that pupils are being well looked after at this time and are being provided with an education. Governors are finding creative ways to overcome the limitations posed by the national lockdown in order to undertake their roles thoroughly. They are committed to the pupils both at this time, and to longer term school improvement for the pupils in their community.
- Since the Chiltern Learning Trust took on the school in October 2019, they have been instrumental in supporting the school throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as being constantly mindful of the wider school needs. They have provided practical resources and advice to support school leaders, while also establishing effective ways to hold leaders to account.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, the interim deputy headteacher and other leaders, including those for reading, phonics and special educational needs. We spoke to the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, the trust's school improvement director and representatives of the local governing body, including the chair and the vice-chair. Six pupils from a range of year groups read to the lead inspector. We also spoke to two groups of pupils and six teachers to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also looked at a wide range of remote education on offer, including recorded lessons, an email from a governor and four letters emailed to the inspection team from organisations that work with the school. We scrutinised documents related to audits carried out by the trust, including one for safeguarding, and external reviews about the curriculum. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 82 free-text responses, and 58 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees (for academies) and the chief executive officer of the Chiltern Learning Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector