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3 March 2021

Stuart Smith
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Dear Mr Smith

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Thomas Bennett Community College

Following my remote inspection with Kathryn Moles, 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in April 2019.

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

- There have been some significant changes in staffing since the last Section 5 inspection. This includes leadership posts within the school at senior and subject level. There has also been a change in membership of the local governing body.
- During the first part of the autumn term 2020, only a very small number of pupils needed to self-isolate and access their education remotely. There was a small increase towards the end of the term for pupils in Year 8.
- At the time of this inspection, approximately 8% of pupils are being educated on site. Around a third of vulnerable pupils and those with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are going into school for their learning.
- Leaders said there were not significant staffing challenges at this time. At the time of this inspection, leaders reported that three non-teaching staff were absent due to COVID-19.

Main findings

- The headteacher's high expectations and drive for improvement have continued, despite the current challenges. Quick actions were taken to ensure that the current education provision reflects the whole-school improvements that are being made, particularly to the curriculum. Leaders continue to be mindful of their pupils, parents and staff in the decisions and actions they take. Feedback from parents and staff during this inspection recognised how much they value this support.
- Pupils can access remotely their full range of subjects. Pupils are continuing to study the new planned curriculum that has been implemented over the last term. Teachers are well-trained and confident in the use of different online technologies. Pupils therefore learn through a variety of live and recorded lessons. The impact of this learning is being assessed weekly. Written and audio recorded feedback from teachers is helping pupils know how to improve their work. While the majority of pupils are accessing the remote education daily, leaders are taking action to support the small number of pupils who are less engaged. This includes providing on-site support.
- Frequent consideration is given to the educational provision for vulnerable pupils. Leaders have supported families in welcoming vulnerable pupils into school alongside the children of key workers. These pupils study the same curriculum as their peers who are learning at home. If vulnerable pupils are not coming on to the school site, specific staff are in regular contact with their families to identify any support they need. Leaders have taken action to ensure that these pupils have the internet access and an appropriate device to use to access the online remote education.

- Staff are working closely with the pupils in Years 11 and 13. An ongoing dialogue with pupils and their families about the support they need has been very helpful during this time of uncertainty. Where needed, curriculum plans have been changed. For example, in practical subjects such as music and drama, there is a current focus on the theory elements of the work. The composition and performance elements have been delayed until pupils are able to return to school.
- Reading has been an ongoing priority since the last inspection. Leaders have introduced digital and audio books for families who may have limited books at home. Pupils are benefiting from the regular opportunities to read that are built into the remote education. Leaders are very aware of the need to help the weakest readers. Many of these pupils are being invited into school during this period for specific support. This includes pupils who are at the early stages of learning to speak and read in English.
- Leaders have prioritised improvements in the support for pupils with SEND. Staff training has raised awareness of the different needs of these pupils and has helped to develop more effective teaching strategies. Teaching assistants are accessing the digital remote lessons to help individual pupils with their learning. Leaders are continuing to consider the further improvements required to ensure that support and provision for all pupils with SEND are as effective as possible.
- There is a strong relationship between the headteacher and leaders within the Kemnal Academies Trust. The Trust has been a key source for advice and guidance during this period and has also given financial aid. This includes the purchase of devices for pupils to use at home. Staff at the school have benefited from the professional collaboration with the network of teachers in other schools within the Trust. This is continuing to drive improvements across the school.
- The local governing body has worked alongside the Trust to continue to support the leadership of the school. Governors work closely with subject leaders to find out about the improvements being made to the curriculum. This has also provided assurance for the governing body around the current remote education provision.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, leaders from the Kemnal Academies Trust, the chair of governors, teachers and pupils to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also reviewed teaching materials and school improvement documentation, as well as the views of parents and staff through Ofsted's surveys.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Kennal Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Aimee Floyd
Her Majesty's Inspector