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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Neal Holder
Headteacher
Farringdon Community Academy
Allendale Road
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR3 3EL

Dear Mr Holder

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Farringdon Community Academy

Following my remote inspection with Sarah Hubbard, 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 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 inspection(s). The school was last inspected 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

- The leader of the Additional Resource Provision (ARP) for pupils with autism spectrum disorder and an assistant headteacher retired at the end of the summer term 2020. A new leader of the ARP took up post in September 2020. Two new special educational needs coordinators were appointed in January 2021 following the retirement of the substantive postholder.
- In the autumn term 2020, approximately 90% of pupils experienced periods of remote education because of COVID-19. Year 10 and 11 pupils were affected more than other groups.
- At the time of the inspection, the school was only open to vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers. Approximately 90% of pupils were learning remotely. Since the school partially closed on 5 January 2021, almost all pupils who are vulnerable and almost all those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are attending on site.

Main findings

- When schools partially closed on 23 March 2020 for the first time, pupils' working from home were required to complete written work packs that were renewed every three weeks. Since then, leaders and staff have strengthened the school's approach to remote learning. Pupils working at home can now access a wide range of different learning opportunities that include 'live' lessons, independent study and directed teacher support when appropriate.
- Pupils are studying their usual subjects with the exception of music, where there is currently a staff vacancy. Curriculum leaders have reviewed the sequencing of the curriculum to ensure the content being covered during remote lessons can be easily understood when taught via digital means. For example, in mathematics, teachers have delayed teaching components of the geometry curriculum, such as transformations, because they feel that pupils learn this topic more effectively in the classroom.
- Pupils at home and in school attend scheduled lessons virtually for up to three hours each day, in addition to independent study time. Year 11 pupils continue to follow their usual curriculum, but with the addition of a number of opportunities to participate in remote careers events following the government's decision to cancel the summer examinations. A review of recorded lessons highlights that teachers often think creatively about how to demonstrate and explain important learning points. For example, in a Year 8 science lesson that was taught via a video link, the teacher demonstrated differing reaction times by dissolving vitamin supplements in hot and cold water for pupils to comment upon and record their observations.

- Across different subjects, pupils are attending more of the scheduled learning opportunities teachers set for them. However, across subjects and cohorts, while improving, attendance and engagement in lessons are variable. You told inspectors that your own attendance analysis shows that disadvantaged pupils are less likely to attend lessons. Records also highlight that attendance in lessons other than English, mathematics and science is not as strong.
- You have recently introduced a new way of assessing pupils' understanding remotely. Systems and protocols for pupils to hand in work and receive feedback are in their infancy.
- There have been changes to the leadership and structure of the special educational needs department, including in the ARP. You and your staff are striving to create an inclusive school. The vast majority of pupils with SEND are attending school at this time. They continue to access a wide range of appropriate interventions to support their social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Staff are focusing on supporting the weakest readers in school by developing pupils' ability to decode and improve their understanding of more complex vocabulary. This is because pupils' literacy development across all year groups is not as strong as it might have been during 'normal times'. Leaders are planning to provide additional literacy lessons and interventions when the school reopens to all pupils.
- Governors and trustees are involved in holding leaders to account for many aspects of the school's work. Governors challenge leaders about the curriculum and remote learning frequently.
- You and other senior leaders are focused on improving pupils' life chances. Challenge and support from educational advisers from outside the local authority have helped to support leaders' actions over time.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, teaching and support staff, a school improvement partner and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also reviewed a sample of recorded live lessons and scrutinised the minutes of the governing body and trustees meetings.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Elliott
Her Majesty's Inspector