

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Donna Park
Principal
The Blyth Academy
Chase Farm Drive
Blyth
Northumberland
NE24 4JP

Dear Miss Park

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of The Blyth Academy

Following my remote inspection with Graham Findlay, 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in October 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

- A new executive principal and associate principal have been appointed since the last inspection. One assistant principal is seconded from another school in the trust for one year. The academy appointed several new governors when the academy council was reconstituted, around the time of the last inspection.
- A small number of pupils had to work from home during the autumn term.
- At the time of this inspection, 12% of pupils were being educated on site. Approximately 40% of vulnerable pupils were attending school. Nearly 60% of pupils with education, health and care plans were being educated on site or at their usual alternative provision placement.

Main findings

- You introduced a revised curriculum in September 2019. The main change was to the key stage 3 curriculum which is now longer, includes music and has more opportunities for pupils to learn about the arts. When schools partially closed on 23 March 2020, you implemented the school's remote learning procedures. Pupils learning from home are expected to attend five 'live' lessons each day in line with their usual school timetable.
- Leaders have given careful consideration to the sequencing of the curriculum to ensure pupils can learn new content remotely. For example, in mathematics, content that would require the use of resources such as a compass, protractor or isometric paper has been moved to the summer term. Leaders have reviewed pupils' prior learning to ensure that new curriculum content can be easily understood because pupils have mastered previously the important concepts and ideas they need to learn new topics.
- Staff have a strong understanding of pupils' individual circumstances currently. The most vulnerable pupils are still able to access pastoral and academic support in school and at home remotely. Leaders assess pupils' safeguarding and welfare needs on a weekly basis. This ensures that vulnerable pupils and their families receive swift and appropriate support when required.
- Pupils' literacy development continues to be a priority for you and other leaders. Pupils who are still at the early stages of learning to read, and are not in school, attend virtual group activities each day. Pupils can read to an adult, listen to their peers and observe as a member of staff models effective reading techniques. You are investigating ways to help pupils access a wide range of appropriate texts while away from school.
- Year 11 pupils continue to follow their usual curriculum, attending live lessons in the same way as their peers in Years 7 to 10. Year 11 pupils who are thinking about attending local colleges or becoming an apprentice are able to

access a range of virtual open evenings and/or tours via the school's digital learning resources.

- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive bespoke interventions, remotely and at school, to help them stay in touch with their learning. Teachers make use of personalised digital workbooks to ensure the work pupils with SEND are asked to complete matches their prior knowledge or supports their additional learning needs.
- Trustees and members of the academy council have a thorough understanding of the school's new curriculum and remote learning offer. Members of the academy council know their role is to provide strategic rather than operational support and challenge to leaders. Accordingly, there is frequent contact between the school's leaders and council members. This ensures those responsible for governance have an up-to-date understanding of the decisions leaders take that are linked to remote education.
- An educational welfare officer works closely with the school to help improve the attendance and engagement of a small group of pupils. Recent interventions have had a positive effect on previously reluctant attenders.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also carried out 'visits' to lessons and looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 74 free-text responses, and 63 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Elliott
Her Majesty's Inspector