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Jim Nixon
Interim Principal
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Dear Mr Nixon

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Ormiston Denes Academy

Following my remote inspection with John Mitcheson, 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 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(s). The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in June 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.

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

- ensure that the pupils who are struggling to read are supported effectively and that leaders' plans are suitably adapted to enable these pupils to access the curriculum
- review and improve the quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Context

- You joined the school in September 2019. Since then, you have appointed one new assistant principal. In addition, there are new leaders for mathematics, English and modern foreign languages. You have introduced a new pastoral team of five year leaders. There is a new vice chair of governors.
- During the autumn term 2020, a small number of pupils had to self-isolate. Some Year 9 pupils had repeated experiences of learning from home.
- Currently, most pupils are being taught online at home. Less than a tenth of all pupils are in school. A small proportion of pupils with SEND are being taught at school.
- There are 18 pupils who are being taught in alternative provision. They, like their peers, are undertaking remote learning.

Main findings

- You and your senior leaders have focused on improving the curriculum. You have made sure that all pupils study a wide range of subjects until the end of Year 9. This includes lessons for personal, social, health and economic education. Currently, pupils are following the same curriculum whether they are learning in school or at home. In the current circumstances, the order of what is taught in some practical subjects has been altered to enable learning to take place at home.
- You have addressed the shortfalls with remote education experienced by pupils in the first lockdown. Pupils follow their usual timetable of lessons remotely. Staff are more confident in teaching using the technology. They have undertaken extensive training on how to deliver lessons remotely. Teachers assess pupils' learning during lessons using a range of different online methods available to them. Pupils understand well how to use the technology and how to keep themselves safe online.
- Not all pupils are engaging as well as they should with their remote lessons. Some pupils are not completing the posted work when they miss a live lesson.

A few Year 11 pupils are struggling to stay focused on their education during a time of uncertainty with their exams.

- You are focusing closely on the education of the most vulnerable pupils so that their needs are met. Your leaders have worked with families to make sure that pupils have access to online learning. Vulnerable pupils are also benefiting from access to other support, such as regular mentoring sessions that are being held virtually as well as at school.
- Pastoral staff are closely monitoring the quality of provision for pupils who are attending alternative provision. This includes assessing whether pupils are receiving the correct allocation of teaching time as published by the Department for Education. Leaders hold weekly conversations with pupils and their parents to ensure that pupils remain engaged in learning.
- Leaders have not made sure that there is a clear structure and sequence for the teaching of reading and phonics. This hinders the progress made by the weaker readers. Support for pupils who are at an early stage of learning to read is too limited at this time.
- You have clear plans to improve the education for pupils with SEND. However, curriculum plans that inform their remote education have not been adapted to meet pupils' needs. Consequently, some pupils with SEND are no longer taking part in the remote learning on a regular basis. There is still more to do to improve staff's expertise in adapting lesson planning so that pupils with SEND can learn well in class and at home.
- Governors are clear about their role to both support and challenge leaders. They hold regular meetings so they can check on the improvements being made, including how effectively the needs of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are met. Governors check that all pupils have access to education by holding regular discussions with pupils and staff.
- The partnership with another school in the trust, as well as the support from the trust, is very beneficial. It has enabled you and other leaders to draw on a wide range of expertise, including advice from specialist leaders of education and examples of best practice to secure improvements.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with you and other senior leaders, the assistant regional director and the regional director of the multi-academy trust. We also talked with two groups of pupils, some staff, and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We spoke to several parents of pupils with SEND via telephone and scrutinised recordings of 'live' lessons.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Ormiston multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Liz Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector