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5 March 2021

Neil Rodgers
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Dear Mr Rodgers

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of James Calvert Spence College

Following my remote inspection with Patricia Head, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 27 to 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 inspections. The school was last inspected in October 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.

Context

- The primary learning leader left the school in July 2020. The head of school now oversees the South Avenue site.
- For much of the autumn term, very few pupils were educated at home. In the last three weeks of term, an increase in cases of COVID-19 resulted in over two thirds of pupils being educated at home. The majority of these pupils were in Years 7 to 11.
- At the time of this inspection, one in seven pupils were being educated on site. Two thirds of vulnerable pupils were being educated on site. In addition, two thirds of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were attending school.

Main findings

- Leaders are working with families to ensure that pupils can access the curriculum successfully at this time, on site and remotely. You are providing specialist materials in art and technology to support work at home. Teachers have checked that pupils have access to technology at home and at school. Leaders have chosen to deliver 'live' lessons as they feel that this gives pupils a sense of routine.
- In Years 5 and 6, you are giving pupils extra time in English and mathematics. This is to address gaps in their knowledge that teachers have noticed in these areas. You are revising curriculum plans in Years 5 and 6 to help pupils build subject knowledge across all subjects. These plans do not currently fully align with those in later years. In Year 7, you have introduced a two-term programme to ensure pupils are more ready to respond to the secondary school curriculum. Year 10 and 11 pupils are continuing with their usual curriculum. This includes their full range of examination subjects.
- Since the last inspection, you have continued to develop the curriculum in Years 7 to 13. Revised plans are largely in place. You are providing training so teachers can plan in ways that help pupils remember more of the curriculum over time. Although COVID-19 has interrupted training, teachers are implementing these plans, albeit at a slower pace.
- Senior leaders are working closely with pastoral staff to help pupils with SEND get the support they need. Many pupils with SEND are in school receiving their usual support. For those pupils who are not, your team makes regular calls to check how pupils with SEND are managing with remote education and to provide any support they may need. Your special educational needs coordinator has produced guidance for all staff. This is helping staff to adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' needs.

- Leaders are taking extra steps to support pupils who need help with their reading. You have arranged specialist training for teaching assistants. They are using this to support pupils in Years 5 and 6 with their reading and comprehension. These daily sessions are delivered in school and to pupils at home. Leaders have not fully trained teachers in Years 5 and 6 to provide this support, although they plan to do so. Leaders have delivered new books to pupils to encourage them to read at home. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 are accessing an online reading programme to support them with their wider comprehension.
- Pupils in Years 11 and 13 are continuing to study their chosen subjects through the daily timetable of 'live' lessons. Teachers check pupils' attendance at these lessons. They check how pupils respond to tasks and questions. They also evaluate the quality of work that pupils complete. Leaders have developed the way they deliver remote learning. This has resulted in more pupils attending sessions. This high participation is enabling future assessments of pupils to be based upon the widest possible curriculum evidence. Leaders are also providing careers guidance to help pupils plan their next steps.
- Governors are checking leaders' actions to provide education at this time. They are holding regular discussions with leaders to examine remote education in action. Governors are also checking the arrangements to support pupils with SEND at home and at school. They are assuring themselves that pupils are receiving an education in the current context.
- Leaders are working with a trust to develop the key stage 2 curriculum. You are also working with reading consultants to enhance the teaching of reading. Leaders are working with a training provider to develop the ways teachers teach the curriculum. This work is developing the confidence and expertise of teachers.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with senior leaders to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown. We also talked to curriculum leaders and school staff. We held meetings with members of the governing body, including the chair. We talked to groups of pupils who were attending school, and also talked to a representative of the local authority.

We looked at examples of remote education and activities to support pupils' reading. We also looked at curriculum plans and examples of pupils' work.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector