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5 March 2021

Amanda Fewkes  
Headteacher  
The Fen Rivers Academy  
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Norfolk  
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Dear Mrs Fewkes

### **Additional, remote monitoring inspection of The Fen Rivers Academy**

Following my remote inspection with Fiona Webb, 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 require serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. 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:

- accelerate plans to reintegrate those pupils who have been learning from home for some time while their placements are reassessed
- make sure that there is a well-considered curriculum for early years through to key stage 4 that all staff understand and can deliver.

## **Context**

- Since the previous inspection, many staff have changed. Some of these staff were on temporary contracts. You joined the school early in 2020. Several governors have left and the multi-academy trust are seeking to replace these.
- Currently, pupils at the school are from Year 2 to Year 7. From September 2021, the school will expand. When all building work is complete, it will be able to admit pupils from the early years foundation stage to Year 11.
- During the autumn term 2020, more than half of all pupils were educated remotely. This included pupils from all year groups who, at different times, needed to isolate.
- In January 2021, the school closed for 10 days for safety reasons after advice from Public Health England. During this time, pupils were learning from home.
- At the time of the inspection, around two thirds of pupils were being educated at home. All pupils in this special school have an education, health and care plan. A small number of pupils have been receiving off-site tuition not related to COVID-19. This is because their placements at the school are being reassessed.

## **Main findings**

- You have offered places for all pupils to attend school during the current national lockdown. Some families have chosen to keep their children at home. You and your leadership team are encouraging pupils to return to on-site learning, wherever possible. Pupils working from home have remote lessons or, alternatively, have paper-based 'home-working packs'. Pupils currently on site told inspectors that they feel they learn best in school.
- Teachers take account of pupils' complex needs. Staff work hard to communicate with parents so that they understand how they can support remote education at home. For example, staff contact parents to discuss how they can support practical tasks, such as counting or measuring, using household items. This is helping pupils access their learning.
- Work to develop the school's curriculum started last year and is ongoing. Leaders have developed subject plans so that pupils can be taught the most

important knowledge they need, building on pupils' prior learning. However, in the current plans, there are gaps in some aspects of the curriculum from early years through to key stage 4.

- The small number of pupils who have been learning at home while their placements are reassessed receive a combination of off-site tutoring and the school's remote learning offer. There are no agreed plans in place for these pupils to return to school, and for some pupils this has gone on for too long.
- Well-being is a strength of the school. Teachers contact parents daily and there are plans in place if contact is not made. You make sure that parents know how to get in touch with staff and get the help they need.
- Leaders have prioritised behaviour management. This has resulted in less time being spent on developing the teaching of reading. Leaders know that they need to ensure that pupils learn how to read well. You have started to check the quality of reading remotely and on site. Pupils use the school's new library and this is encouraging pupils' enjoyment of reading.
- Governors are receiving training. They are aware of their role to both support and challenge leaders and are in the early stages of achieving this. They support and value the actions you and your staff are taking to maintain pupils' learning, both in school and at home.
- The trust provides you with more advice than it did at the time of the previous inspection. Staff value this increased support and training, and it is helping them to better understand their role in supporting pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. The local authority has provided guidance and support which has helped you to consider the impact of the early work you have done on curriculum.

## **Evidence**

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with you and other senior leaders, two multi-academy trust representatives, a group of pupils, parents and carers, a group of staff, four governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during the national lockdown.

We also looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils to discuss the books they were reading. We reviewed academy documentation and looked at the checks and support undertaken for pupils working from home. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including one free-text response, and 25 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of Catch22 multi-academy trust, the regional

schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fyfe Johnston  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**