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Steve White
Principal
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Dear Mr White

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Houghton Regis Academy

Following my remote inspection with Liz Smith, 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 special measures.

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 special measures at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in January 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 strategies and programmes introduced promote wider reading and improve pupils' reading skills
- ensure that those teachers who are less confident teaching online gain the skills and expertise needed to deliver the planned curriculum effectively.

Context

- Since the monitoring inspection in January 2020, the size of the staff team has reduced. In February 2020, you appointed an assistant principal to lead work on improving pupils' behaviour. Six members of staff left before September 2020. Staffing has been more stable since September 2020. The school no longer has pupils in Year 10 or 11. The school is due to close in August 2022.
- In November 2020, all pupils were educated remotely for 10 days when the school was closed due to COVID-19. About 15% of pupils needed to work from home for other short periods of time in the autumn term.
- At the time of this inspection, approximately 9% of pupils were attending on site. About 70% of pupils with education, health and care plans were attending on site. Approximately 25% of the pupils that you have identified as vulnerable were attending on site.

Main findings

- You have ensured that all pupils can receive education during the national lockdown. Pupils follow their usual timetables. They take part in online lessons that they join from home or from school. You have worked tenaciously to get the technology and resources that pupils need to take part in online learning. The parents we spoke to were largely positive about what you have done to provide education at this time.
- Following the monitoring inspection in January 2020, you set about improving the quality of education and pupils' behaviour. Leaders set clear expectations about the things that are needed for pupils to learn and behave well. In the autumn term 2020, you checked that teachers were meeting these expectations. You have continued your checks during the current national lockdown.
- A new curriculum is in place since September 2020. You have given more time to personal, social and health education and physical education. Subject leaders' plans identify the important things pupils should know. These plans include knowledge that is not secure from previous teaching. Leaders' plans include learning that pupils missed in the spring and summer terms in 2020.

- All teaching is taking place remotely. Some lessons are delivered online 'live' by teachers. Others are pre-recorded lessons that pupils access online. Teachers are available online for the whole of the timetabled lesson time.
- Teachers make changes to the order of some content or to how they teach knowledge to help pupils learn online. Teachers check on pupils' learning in different ways, depending on the subject. Leaders have given teachers training in teaching lessons online. Leaders know that some teachers are better at teaching online lessons than others. More training and support for teachers are available to improve online teaching further.
- You are giving all pupils more opportunities to practise their reading skills. Time is taken out of lessons in other subjects to do this. Leaders are thinking of ways to provide extra reading sessions without taking time from teaching knowledge in other subjects. In the autumn term, you introduced a new reading programme to give extra help to the weakest readers. This was paused when you moved to providing education remotely. You plan to start this up again after February half term.
- Teachers adapt learning activities for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teaching assistants work with individual pupils or small groups during online lessons in order to support pupils' learning. Leaders ensure that pupils have any extra resources that they need to support their learning and access to education.
- Vulnerable pupils and others attending the school site receive the same teaching as those at home. You have robust systems to check on pupils' attendance and welfare during online learning. Staff check even more regularly on the well-being and safety of vulnerable pupils.
- The strategic director of academies from the Greenwood Academies Trust (the trust) meets with you regularly to discuss the work of the school. The board of trustees check the work of the school. The trust has ensured that the education you are providing currently meets the Department for Education's expectations.
- The trust has arranged support for the school from a local teaching school alliance (TSA). The national leader of education (NLE) from the TSA reviewed the school's remote education provision recently. He also helped you to get some extra laptops for pupils. A special educational needs coordinator from a local school is providing support and advice to the school one day each week to strengthen provision. The trust has provided some laptops for pupils. The trust has provided support in developing policies and procedures for the safe operation of the school.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, the strategic director of academies from the multi-academy trust, the NLE who is working with the school, the chair of the board of trustees, a group of pupils, and a group of staff to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also held telephone conversations with parents, reviewed curriculum plans from a sample of subjects, watched some online lessons and read the NLE's reports on the remote education provided by the school. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including two free-text responses, and 19 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Greenwood Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wilson
Her Majesty's Inspector