

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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David Lancaster
Principal
Fulwood Academy
Black Bull Lane
Preston
Lancashire
PR2 9YR

Dear Mr Lancaster

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Fulwood Academy

Following my remote inspection with Ahmed Marikar, 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 February 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 action to:

- strengthen further the teaching of reading so that all staff have the appropriate expertise and skills to support those pupils who are most behind with their reading.

Context

- Since the last monitoring inspection, 34 staff have left the school. Trustees have appointed 19 new staff, including you, one vice-principal, an assistant principal and a director of science.
- Some staff from within the school have been promoted to new posts. Internal appointments include: an additional vice-principal, a director of English, a director of mathematics and a special educational needs coordinator.
- A new governing body was formed in September 2020. One new trustee was also appointed.
- During autumn 2020, two thirds of pupils learned from home for short periods of time as a result of self-isolation. All pupils in Year 7 and some pupils in Years 10 and 11 had to self-isolate more than others.
- At the time of this inspection, less than one tenth of pupils were being educated on site. Almost three quarters of vulnerable pupils and half of the pupils with an education, health and care plan were attending school.

Main findings

- Leaders have begun to address the weaknesses in the curriculum. You and the leadership team recognised the lack of breadth and depth in the curriculum. Consequently, you are in the process of revising your curriculum plans to ensure that they are increasingly appropriate and relevant to pupils. For example, you took action to increase the teaching time for subjects such as art and design and drama. The new curriculum in each subject is becoming more ambitious.
- During the summer term 2020, you and other leaders conducted a review of the curriculum to identify knowledge that pupils had missed as a result of the first national lockdown. Since then, subject leaders have been taking steps to identify the most important knowledge that pupils need to learn. They are thinking more carefully about the order in which curriculum content should be delivered. While some subject leaders made secure progress in curriculum development prior to the third national lockdown, there are some subjects that are not as well developed. You have plans in place to overcome this situation.

- You and those responsible for the school are adamant that the pandemic will not derail the momentum of curriculum improvement. Therefore, you and other senior leaders have thought carefully about the education that is on offer during the current challenging circumstances. This is to ensure that pupils, whether they work from home or in school, continue to learn the planned curriculum.
- Subject leaders and teachers have thought sensibly about how to align the remote education offer so that pupils continue to access all that they would usually receive in school. For example, leaders in drama have invested in a 'virtual hall' so that pupils can engage in practical activities. Teachers have undergone appropriate training so that pupils can continue to build their knowledge while working remotely. Consequently, teachers ensure that pupils are able to revisit prior learning and take on new learning.
- Leaders have put effective strategies in place for pupils in the early stages of learning to read. Specialist staff deliver regular phonics sessions to these pupils. The impact of the pandemic has led to an increase in the proportion of pupils who struggle to read. However, some staff do not have the necessary skills and expertise required to help this larger group of pupils to catch up quickly with their reading.
- You and other leaders have prudently identified which vulnerable pupils need to attend school. Staff contact vulnerable pupils who are working remotely every day. The pupils who spoke to us said that, in their view, the current remote education offer is a success. Pupils who work from home and in school follow their usual timetable and maintain relationships with their teachers. Pupils said that teachers respond quickly when they need support.
- You recognise that pupils in Year 11 need to continue to build their knowledge in readiness for the next stage of their education. Consequently, leaders are ensuring that pupils in Year 11 engage with their learning. Most pupils have secured places in further education. You and other leaders have appropriate plans in place to support the remaining pupils with their applications. This includes liaising with external agencies for those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Support for pupils with SEND is effective. You have strengthened the leadership of this area. Pupils with SEND now receive a much-improved offer. There are higher expectations of what these pupils can and should do. All pupils with SEND follow the same curriculum content as their peers. Many subject leaders now use a wider range of strategies to modify the curriculum for pupils with SEND. These pupils receive appropriate, ongoing support from external agencies regardless of if they are working from home or learning at school.

- Trustees are clear that school improvement remains the priority, despite the pandemic. Trustees know the school well. They understand what has been achieved so far and they know what the next steps are on the school's improvement journey. Trustees work well with leaders. They value the transparency of the leadership team.
- Since your appointment, you and other leaders have fostered effective relationships with external partners, including the local authority. With support from a teaching school, you have improved your curriculum offer so that it increasingly meets the needs of all pupils.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke with you and other leaders, including both vice-principals, assistant principals and trustees. We held meetings with middle leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, groups of pupils, the school improvement partner and a representative from a teaching school to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We reviewed curriculum documentation, samples of pupils' work and examples of remote education. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 148 free-text responses, and 80 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Goodwin
Her Majesty's Inspector