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Nigel Sellars
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Dear Mr Sellars

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Gosford Hill School

Following my remote inspection with Maxine McDonald-Taylor, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 23 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 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in February 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.

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

- develop teachers' knowledge of how to adapt lessons for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- ensure that the strategies they have put in place to check on pupils' learning are making the difference that they intend.

Context

- Since the section 8 inspection in June 2019, there have been changes in staffing and governance, including a change of deputy headteacher and additional staff joining the senior team. The school joined the River Learning Trust (RLT) multi-academy trust on 1 December 2020.
- During the autumn term 2020, approximately two thirds of pupils had to work from home for short periods. Some pupils, particularly those in Year 10, had more than one period of self-isolation.
- At the time of this inspection, the vast majority of pupils were being educated at home. Approximately a third of vulnerable pupils and a similar proportion of those with education, health and care plans were attending on site.

Main findings

- Leaders and those responsible for governance have ensured that the school continues its journey of improvement despite the current circumstances. They have continued to develop the curriculum and its delivery, making use of digital technologies. However, leaders recognise that there is more to do to ensure that these approaches make the difference that they intend for their pupils.
- Before the pandemic, leaders had started to review the curriculum. They had already adopted some online learning and, in early March 2020, trained all staff and pupils to use the technology. This action helped them to quickly adapt their curriculum delivery so that pupils could learn remotely. Leaders have developed their approach to remote learning over time; the pupils we spoke to are very enthusiastic about the changes. However, the possibilities digital technologies offer have sometimes overshadowed more fundamental thinking about the content of the curriculum. Some subjects, for example French and German, have a very clearly sequenced curriculum designed to help pupils to learn more and remember more. However, this is not yet consistent across subjects. Leaders have set out how they expect staff to check on pupils' learning, but they have not rigorously monitored if this is making a difference to pupils' progress across the curriculum.
- Whether working at home or in school, pupils follow their usual timetable, mostly online. Many pupils working from home receive telephone calls from a

member of staff to discuss their well-being and academic progress. Well-considered support is often put into place following these calls. Pupils in school also have daily physical education, which they enjoy. In addition, staff provide useful extra teaching for pupils in school who need to make up missed learning or who struggle with their work. This is particularly the case for pupils in Year 11, increasing numbers of whom now attend on site for extra revision sessions in subjects including mathematics and English. Leaders are determined that pupils in Years 11 and 13 are fully prepared for their next steps and endeavour to keep these pupils motivated and focused. Leaders have kept going with activities such as careers guidance, mock interviews and work-related learning, to help pupils maintain high aspirations.

- The special educational needs coordinator and the SEND team have kept in close contact with all pupils with SEND. They provide extra lessons for pupils whether they are working from home or at school. For example, they have worked intensively with pupils who need to improve their reading. Case studies they discussed suggest that this approach has been successful. Much of the work to support pupils with SEND comes from this team and is not fully embedded into the routine work of teachers. Leaders need to develop teachers' knowledge and understanding of how to adapt the curriculum so that all pupils are routinely enabled to access all lessons.
- Members of the local governing body, both prior to joining RLT and since, have supported and challenged the school effectively. They articulate a strong aim of inclusion and success for all in this community school. They have successfully challenged leaders to increase the proportion of pupils who are fully engaging with the education offered. They have systematically explored aspects of leaders' work. They report a greater willingness of leaders to evaluate and explore the impact of their actions. Governors have also supported leaders with the array of health and safety requirements, making on-site checks before all pupils returned to the school site.
- The trust has provided extensive support, especially to re-shape the curriculum. Staff from RLT have worked effectively with some subject leaders and helped them to refine their curriculum plans well. The school improvement team meets regularly with governors and senior leaders to identify priorities. This has helped to accelerate the pace of improvement. The trust has also engaged external specialists to review SEND provision.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive, those responsible for governance, pupils and staff to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also considered some lesson resources and examples of pupils' work and feedback by teachers. We looked at 92 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 80 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

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

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector