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Louise Brammer  
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Dear Mrs Brammer

### **Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Maple Court Academy**

Following my remote inspection with Nicola Harwood, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 25 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 have serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in November 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:

- return to the full curriculum offer as soon as it is practically possible to do so.

### **Context**

- Since the previous inspection, there have been many changes. A new senior leadership team is in place, five teachers have left, and five teachers have joined the school. The governing body has been reformed and there is a new chair of governors.
- During autumn 2020, just over two thirds of pupils received remote education at some point in the term. Pupils in Year 5 were affected by this more than others.
- At the time of this inspection, around one quarter of pupils were being educated in school. Almost all pupils identified as being vulnerable and three quarters of those with education, health and care plans were attending school.

### **Main findings**

- Following the previous inspection, leaders made significant changes to staffing and the curriculum. They created new curriculum plans in all subjects and forged supportive links with another school in the same multi-academy trust. Throughout the pandemic, senior leaders have maintained a focus on their long-term school improvement goals. Consequently, staff have continued to press forward with curriculum developments.
- Currently, the school is providing the same curriculum to all pupils, whether they are in school or learning at home. Lessons for pupils learning remotely are delivered through a mix of live and recorded online sessions and paper-based work packs. Pupils who miss a live lesson or wish to revisit one can watch a recorded session. This means that no one misses out and pupils can remind themselves about something they may have forgotten. Senior and subject leaders join online lessons to check what is happening and give regular feedback to staff.
- In English, mathematics and science, teachers are following the usual curriculum plans, but have built in more time for pupils to revisit and practise crucial content. Religious education is also continuing as normal. In all subjects, leaders have identified 'must-have' knowledge. These 'must haves' help to steer the focus of teaching and assessment and to target any extra support.
- Phonics sessions happen every day. Pupils at home have access to online books and parents and carers can collect books from school. In Reception

Year, for example, every child received a copy of a class reading book so that they could enjoy it at home. Staff run competitions to encourage reading in school and at home and continue to read stories to pupils. Recently, a children's author made a virtual visit to the school to enhance this work.

- The organisation of some foundation subjects has temporarily changed. For instance, leaders have halted modern foreign language teaching, and history and geography are taught in alternate weeks. This is to allow pupils time away from screens for physical exercise and to carry out practical work. Staff have also changed the approach to design and technology. In this subject, pupils are carrying out project-based work based on the same theme for all ages. This is to make it easier for families to work on one joint project at home.
- Staff provide extra online teaching sessions for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils who need additional support in particular subjects can attend school for some lessons, and then access other lessons from home. In addition, the school provides one-to-one and small-group sessions.
- Staff provide online tutorials and in-school sessions for parents to assist them with any problems with technology or other aspects of remote education. Furthermore, the school has provided additional resources, such as fold-up desks and classroom equipment, to help families manage learning at home. Throughout COVID-19 restrictions, the school has continued to work with external agencies, such as social services, to support pupils and check on their welfare.
- Governors hold regular 'challenge and improvement' meetings, which help to shape decisions about the school curriculum and remote education. Governors value the work of the trust in bringing greater ambition and consistency to curriculum planning and expectations. They are informed about school improvement matters and the school's progress.
- The multi-academy trust has provided many laptops for pupils who are learning at home. The trust has worked with leaders to set expectations for remote learning and for keeping an eye on everyone's well-being. Expertise from another school in the trust continues to support school improvement and curriculum design. During this inspection, staff spoke positively about the impact of this. Indeed, in their responses to Ofsted's surveys, staff and parents expressed positive opinions about the school's work and direction of travel.
- Leaders seek out external expertise and advice. A school improvement adviser helps to support and challenge leaders and staff, and assesses the impact of actions taken.

## **Evidence**

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer of Alpha Academies multi-academy trust, teaching staff, pupils, the chair and vice-chair of governors, and a school improvement adviser to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also looked at pupils' work, curriculum plans, remote education resources and information on the school's website. An inspector observed a reading session. We considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 21 free-text responses, and 25 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the Alpha Academies multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stoke-on-Trent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**