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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Martin Brook
Headteacher
Lipson Co-operative Academy
Bernice Terrace
Lipson
Plymouth
Devon
PL4 7PG

Dear Mr Brook

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Lipson Co-operative Academy

Following my remote inspection with Matthew Barnes, 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 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 September 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.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, a new chair and vice chair of trustees have been appointed. Several new trustees have joined the board. A special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and a curriculum leader in mathematics have also joined the school.
- Across the autumn term 2020, approximately 50% of pupils had to be educated remotely.
- Approximately 5% of pupils are currently attending school. There are 38% of vulnerable pupils attending. Of the pupils who have education, health and care plans, 25% of these are being educated on site.

Main findings

- As a result of your careful planning, teachers were well-prepared to offer the curriculum remotely when this became necessary. Senior leaders have created a culture of collaboration. Staff feel confident when trying out approaches to teaching online. Pupils' engagement is strong. They have regular dialogue with their teachers and receive useful feedback.
- Tutors and heads of year know their pupils well. They keep in regular contact with families and are quick to pick up the phone to offer support. Parents say that staff go out of their way to listen and help. Families have access to electronic devices, the internet, and paper-based resources when they need them. Specialist staff skilfully adapt the curriculum for pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- You are in the process of extending the breadth and ambition of the curriculum. This work is already making a positive difference. For example, pupils benefit from reading a planned programme of literature with their tutors. In every subject, leaders have developed curriculum plans which build on what pupils learn in primary school.
- Pupils working in school access their remote lessons with extra support if needed. If the quality of their work appears to decline, specialist staff are on hand to find out why. These staff play a crucial role in helping pupils to stay focused and motivated. Pupils who are not engaging well when working from home are invited to attend school. This supports them to get back on track so that they are able to resume their remote learning successfully.
- Pupils in Years 11 and 13 are continuing to study their courses. They are well-prepared for assessment in each subject. You have used tutor time wisely to provide pastoral care and to address gaps in pupils' knowledge arising from the first period of COVID-19 restrictions. You have rightly prioritised careers guidance to support pupils in their transition to the next phase of education, training or employment.

- You are working closely with parents to support individual pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result of some thoughtful adjustments, pupils with SEND are being increasingly successful. Leaders have provided training for teaching assistants to support pupils with remote learning.
- Trustees have monitored the work of leaders closely as on-site and remote provision have developed. They have been instrumental in ensuring that pupil engagement remains strong. In addition, trustees have considered, in detail, the effectiveness of leaders' work with vulnerable pupils and those with SEND.
- The trust board is in receipt of helpful support from a national leader of governance. As a result, trustees have a clearer understanding of their roles. Their capacity to hold leaders to account for the quality of the curriculum is increasing.
- Subject leaders have received substantial support from the school's improvement partner in developing their new curriculum plans. This work has been complemented by peer support and training provided by the local teaching school. Currently, improvement work is focused on adapting the curriculum for teaching online.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with you, your senior leadership team, three members of the board of trustees, and a range of external partners who are supporting the school, to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We spoke with a selection of middle leaders, including the SENCo, teachers, support staff and a group of pupils. We also carried out a sample of remote education. We examined a range of documents and plans, including minutes from meetings of the trust board. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 88 free-text responses, and 132 staff questionnaires.

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 Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lydia Pride
Her Majesty's Inspector