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Graham Hill
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Dear Mr Hill

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Pilton Community College

Following my remote inspection with Kathy Maddocks, 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 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 May 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 planned curriculum changes fully meet the needs of all pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Context

- There have been very few staffing changes since the last inspection. The school is currently recruiting to fill a deputy headteacher post.
- During the autumn term 2020, approximately 8% of pupils had to be educated remotely due to self-isolation. Pupils in Year 11 were affected the most.
- At the time of this inspection, around 12% of pupils were being educated on site. Approximately 50% of vulnerable pupils and 60% of pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans were attending on site.

Main findings

- Leaders have set high expectations for education in the current circumstances. In the autumn term 2020, leaders focused staff training on the delivery of remote education, including live lessons. This meant the school was able to move swiftly and capably to remote learning at the start of the third national lockdown.
- Leaders have adapted the curriculum effectively to meet current challenges. Pupils follow the same curriculum, whether learning at home or in school. Leaders have made sensible decisions to modify the content of the curriculum. For example, mathematics topics that require in-school teaching have been scheduled for later in the term. Leaders have found creative ways for pupils to experience the wider curriculum, such as attending an online performance of a Shakespeare play.
- Prior to March 2020, leaders introduced a new approach to the teaching of the curriculum. Teachers have continued to employ these strategies via remote learning. Such actions effectively support pupils' engagement and check on their learning. Pupils, particularly those in key stage 4, told us they appreciated the online feedback they receive from teachers.
- Leaders have thought carefully about what pupils need to learn. Developments at key stage 3 ensure that pupils now study a broad range of subjects for longer. Within the trust, staff have shared curriculum expertise, which has helped to raise expectations for Year 7 pupils. However, due to the national lockdowns, the pace of improvement has been slower than leaders would have liked. For example, leaders recognise that there is more work to do to ensure that the content in each subject is preparing pupils to tackle the more complex work.

- Children of key workers and vulnerable pupils who attend on site are receiving an effective education. Staff provide additional support for vulnerable pupils, for example, offering mental health and well-being advice. The school has robust systems to track the attendance and engagement of vulnerable pupils who are learning remotely. Staff are in regular contact with vulnerable pupils who are learning at home.
- Year 11 pupils have continued to study their examination courses. They are attending live lessons and engaging well with their learning. They told inspectors that strong career teaching and post-16 advice have been motivational and helped them to think about their next steps.
- Pupils with SEND are following their usual curriculum. Many pupils with an EHC plan are attending on site and are well supported by specialist staff. Leaders have, however, identified weaker areas of provision for pupils with SEND, such as the identification of pupils' needs. Leaders, supported by the trust, have begun to make improvements so that pupils with SEND are better able to achieve their curricular goals.
- Governors and trustees have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have been closely involved in the development and monitoring of remote learning. Governors have received curriculum training, so they are better able to support and challenge leaders' curriculum decisions.
- The trust has supported leaders to strengthen leadership across the school. Leaders have drawn on external sources to develop the curriculum. This is leading to improvements in the quality of education as acknowledged by the positive responses in the parent and staff surveys. The support from the trust has provided a secure foundation on which to build further improvements.

Evidence

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

We also looked at school documentation and viewed recorded lessons and samples of pupils' work. We looked at 173 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 112 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracey Reynolds
Her Majesty's Inspector