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Helen Murden
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Dear Mrs Murden

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Matthew's Roman Catholic High School

Following my remote inspection with Alyson Middlemass, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 3 and 4 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 November 2017.

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 the knowledge and skills of teachers of all subjects about reading so that they can better help pupils to learn effectively.

Context

- Since the last monitoring inspection, you have become the substantive headteacher. A new deputy headteacher and three assistant headteachers have been appointed. New heads of department in English, mathematics and science and some new subject teachers have joined the school. One member of the interim executive board (IEB) has resigned.
- Over the autumn term 2020, all pupils worked from home at least once. On average, each pupil lost approximately one fifth of their face-to-face teaching time.
- At the time of this inspection, the school was only open to vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers. Approximately one tenth of all pupils were attending school. The remaining pupils were being educated at home. Over this term, approximately two fifths of vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have been attending on site.
- At the time of this inspection, very few staff were absent due to COVID-19.

Main findings

- The school's leadership has strengthened since the previous monitoring inspection. The new leaders are suitably experienced. They hold roles and responsibilities that match the school's needs. For example, subject leadership has been strengthened because a senior leader shares responsibility for the leadership of each core subject with each head of department.
- Senior leaders' effective and flexible work to improve the school has given rise to a new optimism. Staff are more confident and competent in their work. Leaders continue to have clear, high expectations of all who work in the school. As a result, improvements in the school are clear to see.
- You and other leaders have completed the review of the curriculum in all subjects for Years 7, 10 and 11. You make sure that pupils' knowledge builds up systematically. You expect teachers to check regularly that pupils remember their learning. You have paused the curriculum review for the other year groups due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, you will restart this work as soon as you can.

- Most pupils are receiving appropriate education while they are at home. Pupils receiving education on site generally receive the same curriculum as pupils working at home. The curriculum plans being taught currently closely match your normal plans. However, teachers have found alternatives to some practical activities. For example, they have used video recordings and provided materials for simple practical work at home. You have a thorough system to check whether pupils are taking part in remote education. If pupils are not doing so, you follow it up, for example, with direct contact with their parents or carers.
- Many pupils with SEND, including nearly all those pupils with an education, health and care plan, are receiving education in school. You have developed the provision for pupils with SEND effectively since the previous monitoring inspection. For example, you provide appropriate support to pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. In addition, specialist staff provide programmes to support pupils with weak literacy, including reading. You have reorganised how teaching assistants work with pupils. This means that pupils receive support to suit their needs from an appropriately trained adult.
- Most Year 11 pupils are engaging well in remote education. However, you have invited a few who are not doing this to return to school. You also supported Year 11 pupils by completing formal tests before the current national lockdown. This means that you know pupils' starting points and can plan for their progress, as well as having a reference point for any overall assessments completed by teachers.
- One of the school's long-term priorities is to support pupils' reading. This work started before the current restrictions and is developing well. Teachers make sure that the helpful reading activities planned for pupils continue, even though most pupils are working remotely. However, there is still more to do to help teachers of all subjects support all groups of pupils, including those who are vulnerable, with their reading.
- Members of the IEB provide effective guidance, challenge and support to you and other senior leaders. The IEB has focused on long-term improvement. Its members have not been distracted from this by the challenges of dealing with COVID-19 or preparing for the school to become an academy. It is important that all those concerned in the plans for the school's future as an academy ensure that these do not slow the school's continuing, rapid improvement.
- The Diocese of Salford, the local authority and a local teaching school have continued their close partnership in support of the school. Those involved know the school well. You plan for the teaching school's support in developing leadership to continue. Leaders from St Matthew's are now making their own contribution to the work of other schools in partnership with the teaching school. This includes work on teaching and learning, SEND provision and the curriculum.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders; teachers and teaching assistants; some groups of pupils; all members of the IEB; and representatives of the Diocese of Salford, the local authority and a local teaching school, to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown. One of us spoke to a parent by telephone.

We also reviewed documents about school improvement, examples of remote education and surveys of pupils, staff and parents, including Ofsted inspection surveys for staff and for parents (Parent View).

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector