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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Tash Hurtado
Headteacher
The Harefield Academy
Northwood Way
Harefield
Uxbridge
London
UB9 6ET

Dear Ms Hurtado

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of The Harefield Academy

Following my remote inspection with Lucy Bruce, 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in September 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:

- improve the school's reading curriculum so that pupils at the early stages of learning to read develop the knowledge they need to read accurately and fluently.

Context

- A new chair of governors was elected on 1 September 2020. Most members of the governing body are also newly appointed.
- The governing body is currently in discussions with the regional schools commissioner about proposals to join a multi-academy trust.
- In the autumn term 2020, approximately a fifth of pupils experienced periods of remote education because of COVID-19. Pupils in Year 9 and Year 11 were affected most by multiple periods of self-isolation.
- The vast majority of pupils are learning remotely. At the time of this inspection, about one half of those pupils identified as vulnerable were attending regularly on site. Approximately a fifth of those with education, health and care (EHC) plans were attending regularly on site.

Main findings

- Leaders have clear expectations for pupils' learning during the national restrictions. Lessons take place online and pupils' timetables include all the subjects they would usually study. Leaders also provide paper learning packs for a small number of pupils who need them.
- Leaders have continued their work to improve the school since March 2020. They have developed new curriculum plans across the range of subjects taught. These were introduced in the autumn term 2020. The proposed trust has supported this work. Leaders' intention is that these new plans will develop pupils' knowledge incrementally. The current lockdown has slowed down the implementation of the revised curriculum plans. Some subjects are further ahead than others. For example, in mathematics teachers use different methods to check that pupils understand the subject content taught, including online. In other subjects, more work is needed to check that pupils understand and remember what they study.
- Sixth-form students continue to receive lessons in their chosen subjects and courses. In previous years, small student numbers have limited the range of subjects on offer. During the pandemic, leaders have identified ways to expand the options available for sixth-form students. This includes making use of online teaching to introduce new subjects. The proposed multi-academy trust is helping leaders with this.

- Remote education aims to mirror the way pupils learn on site. Pupils join online lessons and complete familiar activities as they would in the classroom. For example, teachers set starter tasks to help pupils recall knowledge from previous lessons. During the current restrictions, curriculum leaders are working with teachers to review the sequence of learning. Content that teachers think would be better taught face to face has been delayed until the summer term. When making changes, leaders focus on ensuring that teaching introduces concepts in a logical order.
- Vulnerable pupils and those with EHC plans are offered places to attend on site. These pupils work in small groups with support from teaching assistants. Through this approach, pupils access the same online work as their peers. If these pupils are learning at home, leaders keep a close eye on their participation in online classes. Where pupils struggle, leaders act. Parents and carers were complimentary of the support provided.
- Leaders have taken appropriate steps to prepare pupils in Years 11 and 13 for their next steps in education or employment. During the summer, pupils participated in a programme to get them ready for studying in the sixth form. All Year 13 students who are applying to university have completed their university applications. Staff have also supported students to prepare for interviews.
- Leaders have developed a literacy strategy to promote pupils' language development. When introducing new concepts, teaching aims to ensure that pupils use subject-specific vocabulary. Teachers expect pupils to share their ideas and talk about their understanding. However, the culture of reading is not as well established. Leaders have not routinely encouraged pupils to read for pleasure. Many pupils do not read regularly outside of lessons. Across the school, some pupils cannot decode words accurately. These pupils struggle to read texts in lessons. Leaders need to address this by implementing a curriculum that enables emerging readers to catch up.
- Leaders' plans to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are effective. The leadership team is determined to remove barriers which might prevent these pupils making progress through the curriculum. Staff make regular contact with families to identify the best way to help their children.
- Governors work with leaders to check how effectively the curriculum is being delivered in the current circumstances. The governing body has also sought pupils' views on the education provided. This information is being used to increasingly hold leaders to account.
- The headteacher has brokered support from the proposed multi-academy trust. Trust leaders work with staff to evaluate the impact of the curriculum and to improve pupils' education in the current circumstances.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also carried out 'visits' to lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 11 written responses. We also looked at 18 responses to the staff questionnaire.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hillingdon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel-John Constable
Her Majesty's Inspector