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Scott Jarred
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jarred

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Nexus Foundation Special School

Following my remote inspection with Alice Roberts, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 4 March 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.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- ensure a consistent approach to teaching early reading across both sites of the school, including for pupils who are non-verbal, so that leaders and staff have a clear understanding of what support each individual pupil needs to become a successful reader over time
- review systems for planning and tracking individual pupils' journeys through their bespoke curriculum, so that teachers are clear about what pupils already know and what the next steps in learning should be across all curriculum pathways.

Context

- A new chair of the governing body took up post in September 2020. Your head of post-16 provision left the school in December 2020. This position is currently being covered on a temporary basis by one of the assistant headteachers.
- During the autumn term 2020, most pupils were able to attend school. However, some pupils needed to self-isolate during this time. You also closed some 'bubbles' due to COVID-19. Additionally, some clinically vulnerable pupils had to shield during this period.
- At the time of this inspection, broadly half of your pupils were attending school, with the other half being educated at home.

Main findings

- Leaders and governors are working collectively to ensure that the school continues to provide an education for all pupils in the current circumstances. Leaders are acutely aware of the additional vulnerabilities of many of the pupils in this small, all-through special school.
- Since the last inspection in September 2019, leaders have reviewed the curriculum, introducing a new curriculum model with four different pathways. Leaders feel this is more suited to the needs of individual pupils, although the model is in its infancy.
- Leaders have fostered close partnerships between parents and staff to ensure that pupils have accessed learning throughout the most recent lockdown. This includes the very few pupils in the sixth form and in the early years provision. As a result, pupils receive a truly bespoke offer. For some, this may be a 'minimal' package as appropriate for them and their family. Because of this, nearly all pupils have continued to engage with their education throughout the pandemic.

- An online system, introduced just before the initial lockdown, ensures that pupils learning remotely continue to access much of their intended curriculum. This enables staff to assess and monitor pupils' academic and pastoral needs, identify pupils who are at risk of disengaging from learning, and to take action to address problems when they arise.
- Staff have successfully adapted their approaches to meet the needs of all pupils. This includes pupils identified as 'additionally vulnerable'. Staff constantly reassess provision for pupils required to learn from home. Consequently, pupils with complex needs benefit from very nuanced adjustments to ensure that their well-being and mental health are equally protected and supported at home or at school.
- Some aspects of the school's normal curriculum, for example, hydrotherapy, cannot be delivered at home. Staff are working to mitigate the impact of this. Offering parents use of the school's hydrotherapy pool outside of school hours has proved successful. Leaders have also ensured that occupational therapists and physiotherapists continue to support pupils and families at home where this is possible. They report that this is having a positive impact overall, particularly in improving communication and ensuring that pupils' complex needs are supported well.
- Progress is evident in the development of the school's curriculum offer over the last year. However, more needs to be done to ensure that staff are fully aware of what pupils already know and what their next steps in learning should be. This is true across all phases of the school and within each of the school's four learning pathways. This will help staff to plan learning that supports all pupils to realise their full potential, both academically and in order to enhance and enrich pupils' future lives after they leave the school.
- Leaders acknowledge that despite some progress, the teaching of early reading is not yet systematic across all curriculum pathways and age groups. This leads to an inconsistent approach to the teaching of early reading, including for pupils who are non-verbal. Because of this, not all pupils with the capacity to do so are learning to read quickly enough, or as well as they might.
- Governors have played an active role in improving the school since the last inspection. Although their work has been restricted by COVID-19, governors continue to provide leaders with support and have critical oversight of key aspects of the school. This includes in the implementation of risk assessments, as well as promoting the well-being of staff and leaders.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils have been able to access the support of outside agencies as far as possible, including from health and social care professionals. They have maintained close partnerships with both the local authority and Kent Special Educational Needs Trust (KSENT). The partnership

with KSENT has been particularly useful in order to share good practice and in supporting staff well-being.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, staff, representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also looked at examples of pupils' work, improvement and curriculum planning, and reviewed your remote learning provision. We looked at 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including seven free-text responses, and 88 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Close

Her Majesty's Inspector