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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Jennifer Tinsdeall
Acting Headteacher
Samuel Laycock School
Broadoak Road
Ashton Under Lyne
Tameside
Greater Manchester
OL6 8RF

Dear Ms Tinsdeall

Additional monitoring inspection of Samuel Laycock School

Following my inspection with Ian Hardman and Mark Quinn, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to your school on 4 March 2020, 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, most of Ofsted's monitoring inspections are being carried out remotely. This inspection, however, took place on site due to significant concerns about leadership and management and the education being provided to pupils in the current circumstances.

The inspection took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. The school was last inspected in March 2020.

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 not taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances.

Safeguarding is effective.

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

- ensure that reading and phonics are taught systematically
- define the steps of learning that pupils need to take in each area of the curriculum and in every year group
- ensure that governors hold leaders to account for the quality of the curriculum and how well pupils learn.

Context

- Samuel Laycock School is a specialist provider for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Most pupils have complex additional needs, although the primary need described in most pupils' EHC plans are either for moderate learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). There is a designated unit for pupils with ASD on site.
- You took up post as acting headteacher in September 2020, after previously being the head of school. The seconded executive headteacher has returned to his school. There have also been two recent temporary appointments to the senior leadership team from a local multi-academy trust.
- Staff turnover is high at the school. Leaders have been dealing with significant staffing absence for some time. Some of this absence is linked to COVID-19, but not all. You and the governing body are working with the local authority and a local multi-academy trust to improve the stability of staffing and leadership.
- Several governors have recently resigned, including the previous chair of governors. A new chair of governors took up post in December 2020. She had previously been the vice-chair of governors. Although some new governors have been appointed to the governing body, vacancies remain.
- In the autumn term 2020, approximately one quarter of pupils needed to work from home for short periods of time due to self-isolation. A small number of pupils had repeated absences due to self-isolation.
- At the time of this inspection, approximately one third of pupils were being educated on site.

Main findings

- The current education that you and the governing body provide is not ambitious for all pupils. School leaders are not giving clear guidance to

teachers to ensure that pupils learn well during the pandemic. This is particularly the case for reading. As a result, leaders are not taking effective action to provide an education to pupils in the current circumstances.

- The reading and phonics curriculums are not delivered well. You have not ensured that reading is a priority, including during the current restrictions. While teachers provide some activities for pupils to practise their reading, this work does not extend their learning. In the main, pupils are practising what they already know and can do by reading familiar books or listening to stories. Added to this, you and other leaders do not ensure that the many pupils who are still at the early stages of reading get the support that they need. Teachers do not use a systematic approach to help pupils to improve their reading or phonic knowledge. This applies to pupils who are learning in school or at home.
- You are in the very early stages of designing a curriculum that meets the particular needs of pupils. While you have tailored the curriculum effectively to meet the needs of a minority of pupils, this is not the case for all other pupils. This is because you and other leaders have not thought carefully about the knowledge that pupils should learn or the order in which they should learn it. The current curriculum is not broad and balanced enough.
- Pupils in key stage 4 also follow a narrow curriculum, leading to the same qualifications regardless of their abilities and aspirations. There is no option for pupils to achieve higher qualifications, even if they are able to do so. This limits current pupils' choices as they progress to the next stages of education, employment or training.
- You and other leaders have not successfully adapted the curriculum to meet the demands of remote education in the current circumstances. The changes that you have made to the curriculum during the pandemic restrict pupils' choices. You have removed technology and French from the curriculum. Pupils who have an interest or particular ability in these areas are, therefore, not able to develop their linguistic or technological knowledge.
- As all pupils have an EHC plan, they are all eligible for a place at the school. Despite this, two thirds of pupils are currently accessing their learning from home. That said, you and other leaders have ensured that most pupils at home take an active part in some learning during the school day. All pupils at home are provided with either a pack of resources or the technology that they need to access online learning. This helps them to complete the same work as the pupils who are attending school on site.
- The governing body is undergoing considerable change. Governors have met with you throughout the pandemic to check on pupils' and staff's health and well-being. You provide governors with detailed information about how you plan to develop and improve the quality of the curriculum for pupils in the

school. However, records of meetings do not show that governors probe the decisions that you have made about the curriculum or how well pupils are learning, including remotely. As a result, the governing body is providing insufficient challenge and support to make sure that pupils receive a suitable education in the current circumstances.

- You are under no illusion that there is much work to do to improve the work of the school in the short and long term. To help bring about improvements, you have sought support from the local authority and a local multi-academy trust. For example, you are working collaboratively with external partners to improve the stability of staffing and leadership. However, at this point in the school's journey, this support has not had the desired effect on pupils' learning.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are safe. Staff carry out checks diligently to ensure that only those people authorised to be on site are allowed into the school grounds. Pupils learn effectively about their personal safety, for example how to cross the road and how to keep safe when using the internet. You have ensured that staff receive regular, appropriate training about how to keep pupils safe, including when working online. Staff are alert to any safeguarding concerns. For example, when pupils do not join in remote education, staff are quick to find out the reasons why and whether any support is required.

Evidence

During the inspection, we spoke with you and other senior leaders; pupils; staff; parents; representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors; representatives of the local authority and representatives from a local multi-academy trust to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We considered the documentation provided. We looked at curriculum plans. We reviewed minutes from meetings of the governing body. We also looked at samples of pupils' work. We scrutinised the safeguarding checks that leaders make to ensure that pupils are kept safe. We took into account the 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 12 free-text responses and 62 responses to Ofsted's 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 Tameside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Cropper
Her Majesty's Inspector