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Clare Redman
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Miss Redman

Additional monitoring inspection of Skilts School

Following my inspection with Ann Pritchard, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 23 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.

Most of Ofsted's monitoring inspections are being carried out remotely. This inspection, however, took place on site due to significant concerns about safeguarding and leadership and management.

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 December 2017.

Having considered all the evidence and taking into account the impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) 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:

- continue to work with the local authority to secure more transport, in order to increase the amount of time pupils can receive education at the school site
- ensure that there is a renewed focus on phonics and the teaching of reading, giving pupils frequent opportunities to develop a love of reading
- continue to make improvements to the curriculum so that it is planned coherently across all key stages, with a smooth transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3, enabling pupils to build on their prior learning.

Context

- The headteacher left the school on 31 January 2021. The deputy headteacher is now acting headteacher, and a middle leader is the acting deputy headteacher. A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up the post in April 2021. One teacher has left. A member of the interim executive board (IEB) has resigned. The school is due to relocate to new premises in east Birmingham in September 2021. The school is due to convert to an academy at the same time and will join the Forward Education Trust (FET). The school is currently consulting on admitting pupils from Year 8 and Year 9 earlier than the agreed date of September 2021.
- Each of the three 'bubbles' in the school had to isolate on one occasion in the autumn term.
- As this is a special school, all pupils are eligible to attend school full time. At the time of the inspection, due to transport issues, most pupils were attending school for two days a week and were educated remotely for three days a week. Leaders have organised the limited transport over the week to enable as many pupils as possible to attend school every week. 11 pupils were not attending school at all, mainly due to parental choice, and are being educated remotely. Seven pupils, identified as the most vulnerable by leaders, are attending school for four days a week. The school is closed to all pupils every Wednesday to enable intensive cleaning to take place. This arrangement is necessary because of the current availability of cleaning staff. However, this position is currently being reviewed.
- Leaders are still reliant on agency staff. The IEB is continuing to manage the employment matters associated with the move to the new site.

Main findings

- In the short time since the previous headteacher left the school in January, you and your deputy have organised clear lines of responsibility and are already working together well. You and the IEB know the current issues the school faces, particularly the low numbers of pupils who are accessing on-site

education as a result of transport issues, which are out of your control. You have already ensured that more pupils are attending school more often, and you are working hard to increase these numbers further. While there is much to do, you have identified and are addressing the right issues at the right time. For example, you are improving the monitoring of remote education.

- You have continued your focus to safeguard all pupils. Arrangements for all pupils, including those not in school, are effective. The pastoral team visits pupils who are not in school to make 'safe and well' checks. You keep detailed records of visits and phone calls to pupils and their families. There is evidence of effective liaison with a range of external agencies to ensure that pupils are receiving the support they need. A small number of parents that we heard from during the inspection praised the pastoral support they and their children receive.
- You have reorganised your curriculum in a way that you think makes it more suitable to deliver remotely. The wider curriculum is addressed through personal, social and health education themes, with other subjects such as science and geography included within these themes. You recognise that it is not possible to replicate the on-site curriculum remotely and pupils are likely to have gaps in knowledge in some subjects. For example, pupils who attend school benefit from sports coaching and forest school, but these experiences are not available to pupils who are not attending school on site.
- Staff adapt a range of remote education activities to meet pupils' individual needs, via online learning and paper-based packs. Paper packs focus mainly on consolidating pupils' knowledge and skills in different subjects, rather than any new learning. As a result, pupils who are not attending school and do not have access to online learning are likely to fall further behind. In contrast, you note that pupils who are attending school four days a week are benefiting from the intensive support they are receiving.
- You are at an early stage of monitoring pupils' engagement in remote education. Teachers and staff do check whether pupils have returned their remote learning to school, but you are yet to fully analyse this information to give you an overall picture of how much pupils are engaging with the learning at home. Pupils complete work independently with limited support from staff. This means that pupils' ability to access all of the work provided is sometimes hindered.
- Pupils in school on the day of the inspection told us that they would rather be at school than at home. They were less clear about the work they were doing at home than in school. A small number of parents expressed their dissatisfaction with the school's remote education offer and pupils' part-time attendance.

- Due to recent changes in leadership and the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, the development of the wider curriculum has slowed. Now that the school includes pupils in Year 7, with plans to include Year 8 and Year 9 pupils soon, you have considered your curriculum intent for all key stage 3 subjects. However, there is no coherent planning in place yet for these subjects.
- Staff are following an adapted commercial phonics scheme, which does not include a writing element. As a result, pupils are not applying their phonics knowledge to their writing. When at home, pupils can access phonics videos to learn letter sounds and are given reading books matched to their phonics levels. Staff are not able to check the difference this is making to pupils' reading.
- Members of the IEB have taken action since the last monitoring visit and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, to address leadership failings. They are challenging leaders appropriately and holding them to account. They recognise that turbulence in leadership and the impact of COVID-19 have had an impact on the progress the school is making. Through detailed checks and monitoring, they are confident that new leaders are making a difference and swiftly addressing the current issues the school is facing, specifically pupils' attendance and the remote education offer.
- The chief executive officer (CEO) of the proposed trust is providing weekly leadership support to you and your team during this interim period, and until the new headteacher takes up their post. The local authority's commissioned priority partner has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted on site. We held face-to-face meetings with you and the acting deputy headteacher and talked to several pupils. We met with four members of the IEB, including the chairperson, the local authority's commissioned priority partner and the CEO of FET to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown. These meetings were conducted remotely.

We also looked at information about remote education, looked at examples of pupils' work, carried out a socially distanced learning walk and looked at safeguarding records. We considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including six free-text responses, and six staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Deb Jenkins
Her Majesty's Inspector