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17 March 2021

Katrina Warren
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Dear Ms Warren

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of The Pinetree School

Following my remote inspection with Andrew Hemmings, 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 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:

- improve pupils' reading by finding out exactly how well they can read and identifying what further teaching and support they need to enable them to decode and comprehend a range of suitable texts
- evaluate the impact which the school's new curriculum is having on pupils' learning, and the extent to which it is equipping them with the knowledge, skills and experiences needed for the next stage of their learning or the workplace.

Context

- At the time of the previous inspection, you were appointed as executive headteacher of the school and other specialist provision within the Unity Education Trust. An assistant headteacher leads the school. A teacher of science and a teaching assistant have left and a new nurture teacher has joined the school.
- All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) at this alternative provision free school. The majority of them have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. All pupils returned to school in September 2020. During the autumn term 2020, a very small proportion of them were asked to isolate at home.
- During this inspection, most pupils were being educated remotely. Up to 17 pupils, mainly children of key workers, or those who are known to be vulnerable, attend the school site at different stages of the week. This includes most Year 11 pupils and 15 of the school's 29 pupils who have an EHC plan.

Main findings

- You and your assistant headteacher have overseen significant changes to the school. Time was used effectively during the summer term 2020 to enable staff to plan a new curriculum ready for September. Working alongside a national leader of education (NLE) and trust leaders, you have devised an individual subject- and topic-based curriculum that enables pupils to gain the qualifications, skills and experiences needed for the next stage of their lives.
- Pupils continue to study their usual subjects through a blend of live and recorded online lessons, assignments and regular mini-tests. You have checked that teachers use the revised schemes of work put in place for all subjects. Due to current restrictions, planned opportunities for pupils to learn off site, in the community, have not taken place. The curriculum is new. It has not been fully evaluated to check that it is working as well as leaders want it to.

- You have checked that pupils who do not currently come into school have suitable equipment to learn at home. All pupils who asked for devices on which to learn now have one. Staff have been trained in teaching lessons online. They provide paper copies for pupils who request them, and guidance for parents who are unsure about online learning.
- Daily registers and records of pupils logging on remotely are maintained to oversee pupils' safety and welfare. Pupils who spoke with me feel that, other than in science, their learning has continued because 'staff are doing their best'. Year 11 pupils are confident about vocational tests taking place this term. They feel they can talk to the school's counsellor if they have any concerns.
- Your monitoring shows that most pupils are learning remotely or in school. However, staff feel that the biggest current issue is those pupils who do not engage fully in learning. Although this is improving, there remains a significant minority of pupils who do not engage often enough in remote education. Despite your offer, only half of all pupils with an EHC plan have chosen to come back into school. You maintain twice-weekly contact with their families and continue to encourage these pupils to return to school so that their needs can be fully met.
- Your assistant headteacher and one of the trust's specialist directors coordinate support for pupils and ensure that statutory duties for pupils with SEND are met in a timely way. Staff know pupils well. This enables them to adapt and personalise learning for each pupil. Regular assessments are made using mini-tests and the school's existing assessment procedures to gauge how well all pupils are doing. Planned weekly support sessions to promote pupils' literacy and numeracy have proved difficult to maintain during the current lockdown.
- The teaching of reading is underdeveloped. Staff do not show a clear grasp of how well all pupils are taught to read. They have not identified what further teaching and support are needed to enable pupils to decode and comprehend texts well enough. You and the trust are aware of the need for improvement but feel the current restrictions have prevented developing this important aspect of the school's work.
- The new trust provides effective governance. Trustees are aware of the school's strengths and what needs improving. Its school improvement board holds you and other leaders to account for the actions taken so far to provide pupils with education in the current circumstances. Minutes of meetings show that the trust's scrutiny is systematic and robust.
- Support brokered from an NLE has helped you to design a new curriculum that you feel is more relevant to pupils and will help staff to re-engage them in learning. You work closely with the two main local authorities who

commission placements. Both authorities are satisfied with the school's provision and its leadership.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you and the school's assistant headteacher, other senior leaders, a group of staff, four pupils, the chief executive officer and trustees of the Unity Education Trust, and representatives of Norfolk and Suffolk local authorities to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also observed a sample of online learning and discussed the school's safeguarding arrangements. We looked at one response to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and six staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the Unity Education Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the directors of children's services for Norfolk and for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector