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24 March 2021

Richard Gartland
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gartland

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Springfield Academy

Following my remote inspection with Andrea Bedeau, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 2 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 July 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:

- check the progression of the weakest readers in their reading fluency
- check whether pupils have remembered and understood key subject content from the curriculum that they have been taught.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, a new vice-chair of governors has been appointed. Two new members of staff have also been appointed.
- During the autumn term 2020, approximately one quarter of pupils had to be educated remotely. This included all pupils in Year 4 who had to self-isolate twice. The Reception class 'bubble' also had to be educated remotely.
- At the time of this inspection, approximately three quarters of pupils were being educated at home. Almost all vulnerable pupils were being educated at school. Two thirds of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were being educated on site. Most pupils with education, health and care plans were also being educated on site.

Main findings

- Pupils study a broad range of subjects in the current circumstances. This includes pupils who learn on site and remotely. Leaders reflect and improve on the school's provision during the national restrictions. Teachers consider how best to support pupils, including the most vulnerable. Staff prioritise regular communication with parents and carers. This helps staff to check that pupils complete their work. Parents value the school's work during the current national restrictions.
- Since the previous inspection, subject leaders have now developed a better understanding of what pupils should learn. You and your team are focusing on helping pupils to retain key knowledge. Procedures to check pupils' understanding in English and mathematics are now more secure than was previously the case. Leaders had planned to check pupils' understanding across the new wider curriculum. However, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, these plans were delayed.
- Teachers are available daily to support families with remote education, if required. This has helped to identify pupils who may be struggling. Staff make regular phone calls and undertake home visits. They provide effective support to families where necessary. Consequently, most vulnerable pupils receive targeted support at school. This helps to develop these pupils' confidence and engagement in their learning.

- Teachers consider how to adapt and refine their curriculum plans in the current circumstances. This is helping to ensure that pupils' learning does not stall. Teachers help pupils to overcome difficulties that they might have. They check pupils' work and provide regular feedback. Teachers also provide pupils with any additional resources that they may need.
- Leaders have developed the quality of the phonics curriculum since the previous inspection. They have benefited from external expertise to improve their subject knowledge. Leaders have reviewed the books that early readers access. Consequently, they have made sure that books for early readers now match pupils' phonics knowledge closely. Pupils now have access to a broader range of high-quality texts. Staff read stories to pupils regularly. For instance, in the early years, children listen to traditional tales and rhymes daily.
- Pupils receive regular phonics sessions, including in the early years. They receive well-structured support from staff. Teachers revisit aspects of phonics that pupils need to practise. However, the progression of a minority of the weakest readers is not checked as well as it could be. This may limit the development of these pupils' reading fluency.
- Pupils with SEND access effective support. Teachers review these pupils' targets. They ensure that pupils' individual needs are met. Staff work closely with the special educational needs coordinator. Together, they consider how best to support pupils. Parents value staff's regular communication with them. Pupils have ongoing access to external expertise, including therapies.
- Governors have a well-developed understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They meet regularly with school leaders. This helps governors to understand the quality of the school's offer for pupils during the current circumstances. Governors scrutinise the quality of remote learning. They meet with pupils at school to evaluate their experiences.
- Leaders are outward facing. They are keen to draw from and use a range of external support. Subject leaders benefited from external support and guidance to improve their expertise. The multi-academy trust provides support and challenge to school leaders. Trust members have a clear oversight of leaders' work and plans for improvement. They work closely with school leaders.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, representatives of those responsible for governance, pupils and staff. We discussed leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also scrutinised plans for remote learning, sampled pupils' work and recordings of sessions for pupils receiving remote education. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 37 free-text responses. We reviewed 22 responses to staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of The Education Village Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Noeman Anwar
Her Majesty's Inspector