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David Kiss
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Dear Mr Kiss

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of The Priory Centre

Following my remote inspection with Tracey Ralph, 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 special measures.

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 was judged to require special at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in January 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 taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances.

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

- ensure that pupils who struggle with learning in the subjects they study receive appropriate high-quality additional support, especially in phonics
- strengthen the curriculum so that pupils acquire the knowledge that they need to progress across a broad range of subjects
- ensure that checks are made on what all pupils have learned and remembered and that this information is used to identify what pupils should learn next.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, the school has undergone significant change. Two successive interim headteachers have been appointed. The second interim headteacher became the permanent headteacher in January 2021. A new governing body, known as the interim management board (IMB), has been put in place. After consulting stakeholders, plans to join Ethos Academy Trust are well underway.
- Across the autumn term 2020, about 30% of pupils needed to access education at home because they were self-isolating.
- As a pupil referral unit, you categorise all pupils as vulnerable. At the time of this inspection, 60% of vulnerable pupils were being educated on the school site and 80% of pupils with an education, health and care plan were accessing their education on the school site.
- Temporary arrangements have been in place for the leadership of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities since October 2020.

Main findings

- Leaders and members of the IMB have strengthened many aspects of the school's work, especially safeguarding procedures. The school's approach to remote learning has also developed over recent weeks. Remote learning now includes recorded lessons, live online teaching, and paper-based activities. It is tailored to meet each pupil's individual needs, with some pupils benefiting from a combination of all three approaches.
- You and your leaders have ensured that pupils have the resources they need to access learning at home. For example, you have delivered laptops to pupils' homes if they have not had a suitable device for online learning. Staff have provided extensive guidance to parents and carers so that they are able to help pupils participate in learning when at home.

- You are aware that some pupils may struggle to use the internet responsibly. You have shared your expectations as to appropriate internet use with pupils and families and provided guidance about online activities that are unsafe. You have sensibly kept a close eye on online safety as part of your ongoing monitoring of remote education.
- You have rightly begun to make root and branch changes to the curriculum. The COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted this work. You are aware that the current curriculum does not consistently enable pupils to know more and remember more in a wide range of subjects.
- Leaders have adjusted the curriculum to ensure that the topics studied are more appropriate to remote methods of delivery. For example, science topics involving practical work have been replaced with topics that work better online. However, too few pupils complete the tasks that teachers set to assess their learning. As a result, teachers do not have a clear enough view of the gaps that pupils have in their knowledge.
- You have diligently monitored pupils' engagement with learning, and their well-being. Of note are the number of home visits that you and your staff have made to check on pupils' engagement and safety. You have sensibly involved external agencies, such as the police, when home visits have given rise to further concerns.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive additional help with communication and life skills. Support for these pupils in other subjects, including in phonics, is less developed. In particular, staff are not trained well enough in teaching phonics. You are aware that this aspect of the school's work is not as effective as it needs to be. You explained that planned actions to develop new approaches to assist struggling readers, including staff being trained in phonics, have been delayed due to COVID-19.
- As a pupil referral unit, all your pupils have additional needs. You have invited all pupils to attend face-to-face lessons on site. You have rightly identified pupils for whom on-site education is crucial. You have successfully worked with these pupils and their families to encourage them to come into school to learn. Pupils spoken to during the inspection were extremely positive about the education provided on the school site.
- The IMB acknowledges that although improvements have been made there remains a great deal to do. Members of the IMB have extensive experience in supporting schools that need improvement. They have brought this to bear in their thorough oversight of remote education and other aspects of the school's work. Having successfully focused on safeguarding, the IMB is rightly now prioritising improving the curriculum.

- The local authority is working closely with you to ensure that external support is focused where it is needed most. The local authority has commissioned Ethos Academy Trust to assist the school in developing the curriculum. This trust shares the high ambitions that you, your leaders and the IMB have for the school.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with you and other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead. We also met with the interim part-time special educational needs coordinator, a group of subject leaders, a group of teachers and a group of pupils. We met with the chair of the IMB along with two other members, the chief executive officer for Ethos Academy Trust, which is currently providing support for the school, and a representative from the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also reviewed an external safeguarding audit. We looked at three free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 21 responses to staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector