

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Kate Morris
Headteacher
Biddick Academy
Biddick Lane
Washington
Tyne and Wear
NE38 8AL

Dear Miss Morris

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Biddick Academy

Following my remote inspection with Lucy Bruce, 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 May 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:

- maintain the successful focus on literacy that is improving pupils' reading and writing.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to the senior leadership team. In addition, there have been a large number of staff changes.
- During the autumn term 2020, about half of pupils studied from home during periods of self-isolation. Some pupils experienced remote education more than once because of repeated periods of self-isolation.
- At present, nearly all pupils are being educated at home. This includes some vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Currently, just under half of pupils with an education, health and care plan were attending on site.
- The school's Unity Centre caters for 35 pupils with autism spectrum disorder.

Main findings

- Staff and pupils have been trained to make the best use of technology to support education at home. For example, the school has provided laptops and paper-based learning packs where necessary. All lessons are live and online.
- You have worked consistently to review and revise the curriculum since the school's previous inspection. You and your staff had already identified the key knowledge you want pupils to know and remember before the start of the pandemic. This work was built firmly on academic research about how pupils learn and includes all subjects. It has helped to strengthen the curriculum. You continue to help staff make learning enjoyable and relevant to pupils' lives. Developments are based on clear values, including raising aspirations among pupils and parents and carers. For example, Year 11 examination courses have been chosen carefully to meet pupils' needs and to broaden the opportunities for their post-16 study choices.
- You and your senior leaders have supported staff to adapt the curriculum to provide remote education. Teachers provide the full range of curriculum subjects to all pupils. Staff have made a few adjustments to their plans so that pupils experience the essential subject content that they want pupils to learn. For example, in mathematics and personal, social, health and economic education, teachers have changed the order in which some content is taught. In physical education, there has been a wholesale revamp of the curriculum

to help ensure that the course matches pupils' needs and aspirations. For example, part of the course develops pupils' leadership skills. To help pupils get back on track when they return to school, curriculum leaders and staff plan to revisit the key knowledge that they want pupils to learn. Regular checks by teachers help to identify what pupils have remembered and where there are gaps in their knowledge.

- Leaders and staff have taken effective action to provide vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers with an education. This is the case for the small proportion of pupils attending school, as well as those learning at home. All pupils have the same access to learning. Leaders' detailed knowledge of individual pupils helps to ensure that vulnerable pupils can access learning effectively. For example, staff provide mentoring or one-to-one teaching for pupils. The well-being of pupils is a key part of the school's work to raise aspirations. Pupils studying at home are contacted regularly to check how well they are coping with remote learning.
- You have made reading and literacy one of the school's key priorities. Staff have introduced a range of sensible programmes to develop pupils' literacy and strengthen their reading and writing. Examples include the recent introduction of a commercial online reading scheme and the reading lists for subjects being published on the school's website. The work to improve pupils' literacy continues.
- The arrangements to support pupils with SEND are particularly well planned. Staff have a detailed knowledge of pupils' needs and use this to provide skilled support. The school caters specifically for 35 pupils with autism spectrum disorder and staff contact families frequently to identify how best to help pupils. Pupils with SEND continue to receive individual support from teaching assistants.
- The school's trustees, who also make up the governing board, are strongly committed to the school and its contribution to the local community. There are clear procedures to check that pupils are getting an education and to evaluate improvements. Trustees and governors have established a sensible balance between supporting leaders and holding them to account. This helps them to take effective action to ensure that all pupils receive education during the current circumstances.
- Support from a neighbouring local authority has helped you to evaluate the impact of the work to improve the curriculum and identify next steps. A partnership with an outstanding school has ensured that staff are trained to use technology successfully to provide remote education. Staff have appreciated these training opportunities.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with you, your senior leaders, the chair of the trustee board and governors to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also visited online lessons and sampled teachers' plans. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 119 free-text responses, and reviewed 69 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim
Her Majesty's Inspector