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Stephen Hammond
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Dear Mr Hammond

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of English Martyrs Catholic School and Sixth Form College

Following my remote inspection with Lucy Bruce, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 16 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.

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 2019.

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:

- consolidate the work that has been done on the curriculum and ensure it leads to strong impact on pupils' learning.

Context

- Since the last inspection, the school has appointed four lead practitioners and a new chair of the local governing body. The school has joined the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust.
- At the start of the spring term, most pupils were being educated at home. Over three quarters of vulnerable pupils and a quarter of the pupils with an education, health and care plan were educated on site.
- At the time of this inspection, a very small number of pupils were self-isolating at home.
- A small number of staff were not in school. These staff were teaching their lessons remotely while pupils are supervised on site.

Main findings

- Teachers have been trained to make effective use of the online learning platform. Pupils' attendance at remote lessons during the partial school closure was carefully tracked, with any absences followed up. This helped pupils to complete the work that they normally would.
- Leaders' work has continued on curriculum development. An audit has been completed of all subjects against the national curriculum requirements. This has been used to inform long-term department planning and to identify key knowledge needed by pupils. COVID-19 has delayed further plans for staff training on the curriculum and has slowed the overall progress of this work. Leaders need more time to consolidate the work that they have started with subject-specific curriculum plans. It is too early for what is currently in place to have had full impact.
- Some leaders have been working together with primary schools to improve the transition from primary to secondary school. The English and geography departments have taken part in this training. In these subjects, this has helped teachers to understand what Year 7 pupils know when they join the school. The plan is to continue this with other subjects in the future.
- During the third national lockdown, leaders adapted curriculum plans to focus on essential missed learning. For example, in Year 7 geography, leaders now plan to re-teach map skills through the two modules being taught in the summer term. Teachers identified this as key knowledge that pupils have not remembered.

- Teachers are using assessments to inform their planning now that all pupils have returned to school. They are completing more formal reviews of learning to adapt what will be taught for the rest of the year. Leaders are conscious of missed learning in practical subjects such as design and technology. Leaders are making this a priority for pupils as they return.
- Year 13 students have completed formal assessments remotely. These are being used to identify gaps in knowledge and to plan future learning. Teachers are prioritising certain content for Year 11 pupils to prepare them for their next steps. For example, in history, they are teaching pupils about legal and economic rights. This is to prepare pupils for A-level study, but also for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders have clear strategies in place to support pupils who are self-isolating and unable to attend school. Pupils either dial in to live lessons taught on site or complete work online. You make teachers aware of who is isolating and for how long. This helps them to plan for any pupils who are absent. If work is not completed, this is followed up by the school.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have received individual support, both remotely and in person. Teaching assistants made use of 'break-out rooms' on the school's remote learning platform to aid pupils' learning. Leaders recognise the importance of supporting pupils' well-being, particularly as they return to school. They are providing lessons on mental health through the citizenship programme.
- You and your team are providing specific support for weaker readers. You encourage pupils to read for pleasure. However, leaders need to build on this work further. This includes providing more structured opportunities to support pupils to read more widely and often. The school will be following a trust-wide approach next year.
- The school has received significant support from the trust and external partners. You have willingly engaged with this guidance. Leaders and governors reflected on the positive impact this has had. Weekly communication between the trust and the school is both supportive and challenging. The local governing body has been in place since September 2020. It is slowly growing in confidence in holding leaders to account.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other members of the senior leadership team, the multi-academy trust deputy chief executive officer, pupils, staff, a representative of those responsible for governance and a representative of the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also looked at records of a local governing body meeting provided by the school. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 79 free-text responses, and 80 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hartlepool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sophie Welch
Her Majesty's Inspector