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Nicholas Froy
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Dear Mr Froy

Additional, monitoring inspection of Bury St Edmunds County Upper School

Following my inspection with Liz Smith, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 25 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 have serious weaknesses.

The monitoring inspection was carried out on site due to significant concerns about safeguarding.

The inspection took place because the school was judged to have serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in January 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.

Safeguarding is not effective.

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

- make sure that systems to keep pupils safe are in place, and fully understood and followed by all staff
- ensure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe from harm.

Context

- Bury St Edmunds County Upper School joined the Unity Schools Partnership multi-academy trust in July 2020.
- Across the autumn term, around 10% of pupils were educated remotely for some of the time.
- At the time of the inspection, fewer than 5% of pupils were being educated on site. Very few vulnerable pupils, and no pupils with education, health and care plans (EHC plans), were being educated on site.

Main findings

- Leaders have not established a culture in which safeguarding is embedded in the day-to-day work of the school. Not all leaders fully understand and use safeguarding systems. Partnership working with the local authority is overly reliant on the involvement of trust leaders and the skills of a small number of school staff. External agencies have had to seek support from trust leaders to facilitate some of their work with pupils. Arrangements for keeping pupils safe depend too much on individuals. As a result, pupils are not as safe as they should be.
- Although new site security arrangements have made it difficult for people to gain unauthorised access to the site, some pupils still do not feel safe. They told us that they do not believe the school will use appropriate protective measures to minimise their risk of contracting COVID-19 (Coronavirus). Pupils do not know enough about how to keep themselves safe from harm, including when using the internet. Safeguarding continues to be ineffective.
- Leaders are committed to continuing to provide a high-quality education during the pandemic. Most pupils learn the same subjects and the same content now as they would if there was no national lockdown. Leaders have effectively maintained the breadth and depth of the curriculum for most pupils.
- Leaders have removed some content from subjects in Years 11 and 13. This is in recognition of the reduced time pupils have had in school. Teachers focus on what they believe pupils need to learn most by the end of Years 11 and 13. Some pupils in Year 11 do not complete work other than for subjects in

which they are to be assessed. The curriculum they study is narrower than that of pupils who attend Year 11 in more normal times.

- Teachers deliver the curriculum in a variety of ways, such as through 'live' lessons using video conferencing and setting work for pupils to complete independently. All pupils, regardless of whether they are in school or working from home, access the same content. Teachers check pupils' understanding and correct misconceptions through regular assessment of pupils' work. As a result, pupils continue to learn what they need to.
- Leaders monitor whether pupils are participating in education through, for example, checking the amount of work they complete during lessons. Staff contact pupils who are not doing as much as they should. This has enabled leaders to have a clear understanding of whether pupils are making effective use of their time.
- The same approach allows leaders to understand why some pupils are not working as well as leaders would like. For example, leaders found that some pupils were struggling to organise their work while at home. This allowed them to help pupils in managing their workload. Checks on, and support for, pupils' participation in learning has led to the proportion of pupils who complete the work set being high.
- Staff contact pupils with EHC plans daily. They tailor work to meet these pupils' needs. They attend online lessons to support pupils. Staff deliver work to the homes of pupils not accessing education online. They provide extra help when pupils ask for it. As a result, these pupils continue to receive the support they need to progress through the curriculum.
- The trust has checked on the quality of current provision to obtain assurance that pupils are being educated during the pandemic. However, the trust's primary focus has been on keeping pupils safe. Although safeguarding remains ineffective, the trust is ensuring improved information sharing and partnership working with external agencies, including the local authority.

Evidence

We spoke to the headteacher in post at the time of the inspection, other senior school leaders, leaders of the multi-academy trust, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance, representatives of the local authority and a representative of Suffolk Constabulary to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown and leaders' approaches to keeping pupils safe.

We also visited online lessons, and reviewed safeguarding documentation, training records and minutes of trust and governing body meetings. We looked at responses

to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 61 free-text responses, and 69 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Unity Schools Partnership multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Hemmings
Her Majesty's Inspector