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Dear Mrs Blackburn

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Nunnykirk Centre for Dyslexia

Following my remote inspection with Sophie Welch, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 18 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 May 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:

- review the timetable for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 to ensure that pupils' personal development sessions do not prevent them from accessing the full curriculum planned for each subject
- improve the subject knowledge of teachers delivering vocational qualifications in key stages 4 and 5
- develop governors' knowledge of the school's curriculum pathways so that they can provide challenge appropriately to leaders.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, there have been no changes to leadership arrangements, including governance.
- All pupils attending the school are in receipt of an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school caters for pupils with dyslexia, autism spectrum disorder and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- At the start of the spring term, around half of all pupils were educated at home.
- At the time of this inspection, almost all pupils were attending on site.

Main findings

- Following the first national lockdown, leaders set up an online platform of live lessons to mirror the timetable pupils typically experience. You and your team took action to ensure that pupils continued to study all subjects and vocational qualifications. Teachers delivered tutorials to individual pupils as well as class sessions. Pupils sent completed work to their teachers online. Those who continue to work at home at this time receive a well-planned remote education offer. These actions have helped to provide pupils with continuity in their learning in the current circumstances.
- Before the third national lockdown, curriculum development was slow. Leaders were dealing with a high turnover of staff and uncertainty over the school's future. More recently, they have appointed subject specialists to strengthen leadership of the curriculum. They have developed new curriculum pathways shaped by pupils' needs and aspirations. The pathways reflect leaders' ambition to ensure that pupils are well prepared for the opportunities available to them when they leave school. New qualifications have also been introduced to complement the pathways. For instance, pupils can obtain qualifications in subjects such as digital media. However, not all curriculum plans have been completed. Some teachers do not have the specialist expertise to fully embed new knowledge and concepts into subject plans. Leaders seek to build partnerships with local further education providers to

improve the professional development and subject knowledge of teachers. However, this work has been delayed because of the pandemic.

- You and your team use a range of strategies to find out how well all pupils, including those in Years 11 and 13, understand what they have studied. These strategies are tailored to pupils' needs and focus on enabling pupils to show what they know and can do in different subjects. The checks are helping leaders and staff to make decisions on the curriculum content to revisit now that almost all pupils are learning on site. Leaders also have an eye to the future, and they are using these checks to inform their longer-term thinking about curriculum pathways and qualifications.
- Leaders changed the sequence of curriculum content during the pandemic. Concepts that teachers thought may be difficult for pupils to learn remotely were delayed. Since returning from the third national lockdown, teaching combines new knowledge with the repetition of previous learning that staff want pupils to remember. Pupils told inspectors that they like repeating learning and creating 'revision snap cards' because it helps them to remember and do more in class.
- Leaders have prioritised careers sessions for all pupils. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 explained that these sessions sometimes take place during lessons for subjects such as music. This means that pupils miss out on studying all aspects of the planned programme of learning in these subjects. For pupils in Years 11 and 13, support is given to provide suitable work experience placements and mentorship.
- The teaching of reading is carefully planned around the needs of individual pupils. Leaders prioritise reading fluency and language development. Pupils receive one-to-one help to develop their reading and vocabulary. Pupils practise reading at home using short novels and text extracts. Teachers select texts carefully to build pupils' confidence.
- EHC plan targets are prioritised through pupils' curriculum pathways. Teachers seamlessly include the targets in class work, and these are checked frequently. Parents and carers receive updates informing them about their children's learning.
- Governors have supported leaders with investment in technology to support the delivery of remote education. They visit the site to monitor the education provided in the current circumstances. However, they are less informed about the curriculum. Although leaders provide regular updates about curriculum developments, governors have not checked the impact of this work.
- The local authority provides challenge to the school. An adviser has supported leaders to prioritise strategic areas for development. Regular visits to evaluate leaders' actions were suspended because of the pandemic.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, representatives 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 looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 10 free-text responses, and 17 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel-John Constable
Her Majesty's Inspector