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Andrew Fowler
Principal
Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy
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Dear Mr Fowler

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy

Following my remote inspection with Lisa Strong, 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 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 June 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.

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

- develop and embed an effective approach to reading that focuses on those pupils who cannot read well
- ensure that curriculum plans clearly set out what pupils need to know in all subjects
- keep parents and carers up to date about the school's operation and priorities, including any actions taken by leaders.

Context

- A new principal has been appointed since the school was last inspected. The senior leadership team has also been restructured and reduced in size.
- Across the autumn term 2020, nearly three quarters of pupils had at least one period of remote education. Years 10 and 11 were affected more than any other year group.
- At the time of this inspection, most pupils were being educated remotely. Approximately two thirds of vulnerable pupils were being educated on site. Over half of all pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans were attending school.

Main findings

- During the third national lockdown, you and your team have been focused on providing education for all pupils. Since February 2021, pupils have received live teaching in at least one out of every three lessons. The other two lessons involve pupils accessing pre-recorded teacher explanations and other resources.
- Most responses to Ofsted's parent survey praised the work done by leaders to provide education remotely. Many parents commented on the excellent communication between school and home. They felt that the school had improved under the new leadership. However, a minority of parents felt that their concerns are not listened to.
- Staff have received training on how to teach remotely. Leaders have adapted the professional development programme. Training is now delivered weekly and is matched to the specific needs of teachers.

- Leaders have worked to raise ambition through a revised curriculum. In Years 7 to 9, subject planning now gives more consideration to what pupils have learned at primary school. Leaders said that, during the third national lockdown, they have continued to deliver most curriculum content as planned. In a small number of subjects, they have made minor changes to the order in which knowledge is taught. For example, in mathematics, the teaching of transformations has been delayed as staff believe this is more difficult to teach remotely. Despite leaders' work and efforts, though, the curriculum requires further development. For example, curriculum plans do not always specify the subject knowledge that pupils need to know.
- Pupils in Years 11 and 13 continue to follow their normal curriculum. When these pupils return, they will focus on deepening existing knowledge rather than learning new content. Leaders also recognise, rightly, that pupils will need to be taught additional content so that they are not disadvantaged in the next stage of their education.
- The school provides vulnerable pupils with on-site education. These pupils are taught face-to-face by subject-specialist teachers in year-group 'bubbles'. Leaders have also made this on-site provision available to pupils who are struggling to learn remotely. All vulnerable pupils not attending on site are contacted regularly by the school, and home visits are carried out when necessary.
- Leaders have continued to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), both on site and remotely. For example, pupils' EHC plans have continued to be updated and staff have had training on how to adjust their lessons for pupils with SEND. A small group of pupils with autism spectrum disorder have also come into the school during the third national lockdown. Some additional reading support has been delayed as a result of pupils learning remotely. However, firm plans are not in place to support these pupils' reading when they return to school.
- Governors know the school well and have played a key role in establishing the new leadership structure. They are knowledgeable about what leaders are doing to provide remote education and work closely with senior leaders so that they know what is being done. Governors have provided the principal with regular support during the pandemic, through fortnightly meetings.
- Leaders said that they have gained valuable support from working with an outstanding partner school. This has involved regular formal contact between senior leaders. This partnership provided a helpful source of knowledge when setting up remote education. Middle leaders from both schools have also been working together to quality assure the curriculum.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, subject leaders and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also reviewed documentation provided by the school, including curriculum plans, and watched a small sample of recorded lessons. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 110 free-text responses, and 114 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 Gateshead. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jasper Green
Her Majesty's Inspector