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Gemma Down  
Principal  
Croft Academy  
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Dear Miss Down

### **Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Croft Academy**

Following my remote inspection with Eve Morris, 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in June 2018.

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:

- ensure curriculum planning in languages, design and technology, art and music is further developed to enable pupils to know and remember more
- use information gathered from assessments to help identify pupils who require further support to catch up on their learning.

### **Context**

- You were appointed as principal in December 2018. The school appointed a new vice principal in September 2018.
- Between the start of January and 5 March 2021, 23% of pupils were educated on site. Approximately 66% of vulnerable pupils and 60% of pupils with education, health and care plans attended school during this period.
- At the time of this inspection, 96% of pupils were attending on site. For the small number of pupils yet to return to school, you have been in regular contact with their parents.

### **Main findings**

- Leaders have taken a phased approach to introducing the whole curriculum since the school reopened to all pupils on 8 March 2021. Initially, you and your staff have worked closely with pupils to re-establish school routines and quickly resume learning in reading, writing and mathematics. You have also prioritised personal, social, health and economic education to ensure that pupils' well-being is supported as part of their return to school. You have clear plans in place to resume learning in other subjects as soon as possible.
- Prior to the pandemic, leaders had begun work on improving the school's curriculum. Your curriculum aims to address issues of aspiration and health while celebrating diversity in the local community. Staff have worked closely with leaders, other schools in the local federation and with an external company to develop pupils' mathematical and reading knowledge. As a result, teaching in English and mathematics has strengthened.
- Leaders have also worked hard to strengthen the curriculum in other subjects. In history and geography, for example, curriculum plans have been developed to ensure that there is a clear sequence of learning and that pupils build on their prior knowledge. Teachers have benefited from support across the federation in the teaching of computing. Leaders have improved pupils' access to equipment and have provided staff with support to help them improve their teaching of computing. As a result, teachers' knowledge and confidence in the subject have improved.

- You recognise that the school still has areas of the curriculum that need to improve. In languages, for example, you have been reliant on an external teacher coming into school to teach Mandarin. This teacher is currently unavailable and therefore teaching in the subject has been paused. Curriculum planning and delivery of a modern foreign language is yet to be developed since the teaching of Mandarin has stopped. You are also clear that further work is needed to strengthen the curriculum in design and technology, art and music.
- Leaders are using various methods to identify what pupils have learned and remembered from the taught curriculum. Assessments include the use of external tests provided by the trust to assess pupils' knowledge in reading and mathematics. In lessons, teachers use questioning and 'exit tickets' to check what pupils can remember. Leaders recognise the importance of using this information effectively to help identify pupils who need to catch up on their learning. However, at this time, leaders have not yet identified these pupils and their gaps.
- Leaders have improved the teaching of reading since the last inspection. Staff have received high-quality training and you have ensured there is a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics across the school. Feedback from teachers indicates that progress in phonics has slowed during this latest lockdown. Your staff have acted quickly, including in the early years, to carry out phonics checks to regroup pupils according to their need.
- Staff continue to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. Leaders have adapted their methods of assessment effectively to include more practical tasks to find out what pupils with SEND know and remember. This is particularly the case for English and mathematics. Your focus for pupils with SEND is now on speech and language development.
- Weekly reports allow the trust board to review the actions taken by leaders, including the support for the well-being of both staff and pupils. Trustees then use this information to support and challenge leaders. For example, trustees challenged leaders about the number of pupils attending school during the latest national lockdown and levels of engagement with remote learning. The trust engages well with parents. Recent surveys show that most parents believe that the trust actively supports their child's well-being and provides an effective remote education provision.
- Trust leaders have worked closely with the school to provide support. The 'Team Around the Academy' helps leaders with their work on the curriculum and standards of education. The trust provides access to a virtual school for those pupils who need to self-isolate. Trust leaders have a clear sense of the improvements that have been made since the last inspection and the work that still needs to be done around the curriculum.

## **Evidence**

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

We also looked at curriculum plans on the school's website. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including four free-text responses, and 33 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Elliot Foundation Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Howes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**