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Glenn Prebble  
Head of School  
Holmesdale School  
Malling Road  
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Kent  
ME6 5HS

Dear Mr Prebble

### **Additional monitoring inspection of Holmesdale School**

Following my inspection with Alice Roberts, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 10 and 12 February, 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 special measures.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, this monitoring inspection was initially carried out remotely but moved to an on-site visit due to significant concerns about safeguarding.

The inspection took place because the school was judged to require special measures at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent Section 5 inspection took place in February 2018.

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:

- rapidly improve the culture of safeguarding so that all relevant members of staff can access a single record of documentation relating to the welfare of all vulnerable pupils
- ensure that leaders responsible for safeguarding are aware of and apply all of their statutory duties in line with the latest government legislation.

## **Context**

- The local authority commissioned Swale Academies Trust (SAT) to lead the school following the departure of the previous headteacher in December 2018. The current executive headteacher, head of school and designated safeguarding leader are employed by SAT. There is an interim executive board (IEB) in place and a new chair was appointed in July 2019. There are currently no students in Year 13.
- Approximately 70% of pupils were educated remotely at some point during the autumn term of 2020 because of the need to self-isolate.
- Just over 10% of pupils are being educated on site currently. This includes fewer than half of the pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans for their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The number of vulnerable pupils attending school has increased as the term has progressed. Around 40% of pupils attending school are children of key workers.

## **Main findings**

- Leaders have continued to make improvements to the curriculum and pupils' learning despite the challenges of the current pandemic. Many parents who completed our survey recognise the improvements being made to the school and are grateful for the efforts to provide appropriate education remotely.
- Education is being provided in all subjects. A small but growing number of pupils in key stage 4 are now studying a broader and appropriately challenging curriculum, because subjects like Spanish have been introduced. There has been a renewed emphasis on personal development and pupils' health and well-being.
- Teachers have adapted the order in which topics are taught in some subjects. Face to face teaching time between lockdowns has been used thoughtfully to fill gaps in pupils' knowledge and to teach those elements of the curriculum that would be most difficult to teach remotely. A similar approach has been taken during the current lockdown, with some trickier topics in mathematics and science postponed until pupils all return to school. Teachers have slowed the pace of teaching in modern foreign languages to give pupils working remotely more time to practise and rehearse what they have learned.

- A greater number of vulnerable pupils are coming to school than in previous lockdowns. The number of pupils attending school is increasing as staff use their regular welfare checks to identify additional pupils who may benefit from being in school. Some more able pupils in Year 11 who would have been preparing for examinations have been invited into school
- Pupils attending school are receiving the same curriculum that is being taught remotely, through a balance of live and recorded lessons. Pupils in school have additional support from staff working in school to help them. Pupils that we met were very positive about this and valued the extra support they are receiving.
- Leaders are checking on the well-being and progress of pupils with EHC plans when they are not attending school. Teachers demonstrated to us how the usual curriculum is planned to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. For example, teachers use live modelling of new concepts and knowledge, such as chemical equations in science. Teachers and pupils told us that the techniques we saw being used remotely mirror the 'Holmesdale homestyle' approach that is used in school.
- The members of the IEB are experienced and skilled and have a thorough understanding of the substantial improvements that have been made to the curriculum by having a stable staff group. Staff who completed our survey are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school.
- The IEB hold leaders to account for all aspects of improvement and provide careful support where needed. Despite their regular checks on safeguarding, and the assurances they were given by leaders, members were not aware of some of the weaknesses identified during this inspection. The IEB are resolute in their determination to put them right quickly.
- The local authority monitors the work of SAT leading the school using external consultants and contractors. The local authority has not independently audited safeguarding arrangements since 2018.
- Weaknesses in safeguarding procedures identified in both the previous inspection and subsequent monitoring visit in 2018, and in the local authority's audit in 2018, remain. These weaknesses relate to the effectiveness of leaders responsible for safeguarding fulfilling aspects of their statutory duties and how records about vulnerable pupils, including those attending alternative provision, are kept.
- The school simultaneously operates multiple recording systems relating to safeguarding. This does not match the school's own policy and allows for duplication and omission which could put pupils at risk of harm. Inspectors observed mismatches in information within different systems. Some members

of staff hold records of a safeguarding nature in their own separate files rather than in safeguarding records.

- Inspectors found examples of poor practice where key conversations and decision making between safeguarding leaders and other professionals relating to vulnerable pupils were not recorded. Leaders responsible for training all staff in safeguarding were not following the statutory guidance themselves.
- Senior leaders had not spotted these weaknesses through their routine monitoring. Nonetheless, leaders took swift action, during the inspection, to start to change procedures.
- All pupils are known well as individuals by at least one adult in school and during this lockdown have had their welfare checked regularly. Pupils we met in school told us they feel safe and have someone to talk to if they have any concerns. Pupils have a confidential text system to inform staff of any concerns they have when out of school.

## **Evidence**

This inspection was initially conducted remotely but moved to an on-site visit due to concerns about safeguarding. The inspection was paused on the 11 February because leaders closed the school site to pupils due to poor weather conditions.

We spoke to you, the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, designated safeguarding leaders, subject leaders and leaders responsible for provision for pupils with SEND. We also met with the chief executive officer of Swale Academies Trust, the chair and another member of the interim executive board and a representative of the local authority. We also held a telephone conversation with the director of education for Kent County Council. We talked to pupils who were attending the school site. All of these conversations allowed us to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown and the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures.

We also looked at a sample of recordings of remote lessons, curriculum plans, and examples of pupils' work completed during the current lockdown. We looked at a wide range of documentation that was related to safeguarding. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 24 free-text responses, and 44 staff questionnaires. We telephoned a small number of parents.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**