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Dear Mr Henton

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School

Following my remote inspection with Mark Howes, 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 action to:

- ensure that curriculum leaders fully evaluate the impact of their curriculum so that pupils know more and remember more
- provide any new governors with the training they need to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.

Context

- Since October 2020, there has been an acting chair of the governing body.
- Between the start of January and 5 March 2021, approximately 10% of pupils were educated on site. This group included 10% of vulnerable pupils and 50% of pupils with an education, health and care plan.
- At the time of this inspection, approximately 90% of pupils were attending on site.

Main findings

- Since the last inspection, leaders have carried out a check of the curriculum to make sure that it covers all the requirements of the national curriculum. Staff have had a lot of training to improve the quality of curriculum delivery. Leaders recognise that some subjects are stronger than others. As a result, pupils are not doing as well in a small number of subjects as they should be. Leaders are addressing this.
- Currently, leaders are focusing on literacy and numeracy. They say that this will help pupils' learning across subjects. Adaptations have been made to the Year 11 curriculum by giving pupils the option to study a short course in religious education (RE) rather than a full GCSE. Leaders say that this will reduce the pressure on pupils and give them extra time to focus on other examination subjects, including English. Most pupils have opted out of taking GCSE RE.
- Leaders have raised the profile of reading. They now expect all pupils to read in form time. Additional funding has been used to buy electronic books and to expand a reading programme so that it includes all pupils in key stage 3. Leaders say that it is too early for them to know what difference this has made.
- Teachers continue to carry out checks to see what pupils remember from the taught curriculum. Starter activities are used to recall prior learning. In mathematics, for example, teachers use short revision questions to check what pupils have learned and remembered. Subject leaders say that they are confident they know where pupils are at with their learning, and which pupils need extra help. They say that it is likely they will need to make some

changes to their curriculum plans for the summer term to pick up on gaps in pupils' learning.

- Pupils who need additional help are being supported in several ways. Extra funding is being used to provide some of this help. For example, a new pastoral mentor supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. A counsellor helps targeted pupils.
- Over time, leaders have developed and refined their remote education provision. Pupils say that they enjoy the work set for them when they are learning from home. They say it is set at the right level. Parents praise the quality of the work provided. They also value the communication they have with the school to support them with their child's learning and well-being. Leaders say that if pupils need to learn from home at any point in the future, these arrangements will continue.
- Pupils in Year 11 are well prepared for the next stage in their education. Support for pupils over recent months has included interviews with the careers adviser, mock interviews and help with college applications. As a result, most pupils in Year 11 have an appropriate plan in place for September 2021.
- Governors are committed to the school. They provide leaders with an appropriate balance of support and challenge. Governors hold leaders to account effectively for the decisions they are making, for example how they are using additional funding. Governors know that the school still has areas for improvement, but they have confidence in leaders' ability to make this happen.
- The school's improvement partner makes regular visits to the school. Leaders find these visits useful. They are helping leaders to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning through new staff appointments. The local authority is also helping the school, for example by providing external support from a national lead in education. As a result, aspects of governance have been further developed. However, leaders acknowledge that they need to recruit more members to the governing body and then provide the appropriate training for them.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, curriculum leaders, pupils, representatives of those responsible for governance, the school improvement partner, and a representative of the local authority, to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also scrutinised the minutes of governing body meetings and looked at information about remote education and the curriculum. We looked at responses to

Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 80 free-text responses, and 49 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Yates
Her Majesty's Inspector