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Clive Jones
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Dear Mr Jones

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Smestow School

Following my remote inspection with Martin Pye, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 25 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:

- further evaluate and develop the school's curriculum to enable pupils to deepen their conceptual knowledge
- ensure that Year 7 pupils, who are currently part of the school's 'recovery curriculum', are supported in their transition back to the school's usual curriculum
- ensure that music is part of the school's curriculum as soon as possible so that pupils receive a fully broad and balanced curriculum.

Context

- There have been substantial changes in senior leadership since the last inspection. You were appointed as executive headteacher in September 2019. Up to October 2020, the school has had two different heads of school. Both have now left. Two new deputy headteachers have been appointed over the last year. You have been the substantive headteacher since October 2020. Following the last inspection, an Interim Advisory Board (IAB) has overseen the governance of the school.
- Between the start of January and 5 March 2021, 11% of pupils were being educated on site. Approximately 42% of vulnerable pupils and 22% of those with education, health and care plans attended school during this period.
- At the time of this inspection, 94% of pupils were attending on site. A combined Year 8 and Year 9 'bubble' was currently working at home due to a positive case of COVID-19.

Main findings

- Since the autumn term 2019, you have been working on a new school curriculum. Leaders have aligned the school's values with the knowledge pupils need to know and remember in different subjects. You have considered how topics are sequenced so that pupils build on prior learning. Although the school has experienced many challenges over the last year, your work to develop curriculum plans has continued. However, leaders recognise that there is still more work to do. While some work has begun to evaluate the curriculum, more time is needed to consider and plan for how pupils can deepen their conceptual knowledge.
- Leaders adapted the curriculum while most pupils were working from home during the recent lockdown. In mathematics, for example, leaders decided Year 7 pupils should continue working on fractions rather than start a new unit on ratio and proportion. Teachers were also able to carry out checks on what pupils had learned and remembered through quizzes and self-marking

forms. Consequently, teachers know where pupils are up to with their learning. Leaders have adjusted curriculum plans for the summer term to help pupils get back on track.

- Leaders identified that a large proportion of Year 7 pupils had gaps in their core knowledge when they joined the school in September 2020. Assessment checks in reading, for instance, showed that pupils required additional support. As a result, you have introduced a 'recovery curriculum' and pupils are benefiting from the specialist knowledge of primary practitioners. This is helping pupils to settle into secondary school and get them back on track. Leaders recognise this is a short-term measure and that pupils will need further support when they move back to the depth of the school's usual curriculum.
- Currently, pupils are not studying music. Leaders know that all pupils should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that includes music. You have recently advertised for a music teacher and have plans to reintroduce the subject to the school curriculum from September 2021.
- Pupils in Year 11 and Year 13 are being supported well. Teachers have been given guidance about managing pupils' concerns, and extra pastoral support has been offered to those who need it. Pupils appreciate the work the school has done to support their welfare and the additional careers guidance they are getting.
- Leaders have effective procedures in place for remote learning should a 'bubble' be sent home or if any pupils need to self-isolate. The school's website provides pupils with access to schoolwork and instructions on how to complete tasks.
- Leaders have recently strengthened the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They continue to work with other professional services and ensure that pupils with SEND get access to the support they need. Leaders have worked closely with teachers during this period to ensure that pupils with SEND continue to develop their knowledge in literacy and numeracy.
- The IAB is helping the school move forward. Members of the IAB have a background in education and provide effective support and challenge to school leaders. The IAB has a strong understanding of the school's remote learning provision and how it aligns with the school curriculum. Board members have challenged leaders around levels of remote engagement and the support provided to pupils with SEND and those with English as an additional language.
- The trust has supported the school well during this period. Trust leaders ensured that laptops were available to all those pupils who needed them

during the recent lockdown. They have also provided support with the lateral flow testing of pupils who returned to school. The executive leadership team continues to offer effective challenge to school leaders around improvements to the school curriculum. The executive headteacher has brought about much-needed stability in senior leadership.

Evidence

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

We also looked at school curriculum plans on the school website. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 31 free-text responses, and 53 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the University of Wolverhampton multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Howes
Her Majesty's Inspector