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Mr James Doherty
Principal
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Dear Mr Doherty

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of UTC Portsmouth

Following my remote inspection with Stephen Long, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 2 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 have serious weaknesses.

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 was judged to have serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in February 2020.

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

Context

- Since the last inspection, an assistant principal has left the school. A replacement was appointed from within the existing staff, taking up this role from September 2020. A new deputy principal joined the school in May 2020. The current chair of trustees took up his post in December 2020, after his predecessor stepped down in August 2020.
- During the autumn term 2020, only a small proportion of pupils were absent from school due to reasons linked to COVID-19. In most instances, this was for a very small number of days. Approximately 30 pupils were required to work from home for the final week of the autumn term.
- Currently, all pupils are accessing their education from home. There are no pupils on the school site.
- At the time of this inspection, leaders report no significant staffing issues linked to COVID-19.

Main findings

- Leaders remain committed to their planned curriculum, building on strengths seen at the last inspection. As such, pupils continue to learn the same subjects that they did before the start of the pandemic.
- In some subjects, theory based topics are being taught out of the normal sequence. Leaders intend returning to more practical topics when pupils come back to school and can use laboratories and workshops.
- Leaders have adapted how some non-examined subjects, such as physical education, are taught. These changes promote pupils' health and well-being successfully by encouraging them to be active.
- Since January 2021, all pupils have been learning from home. Pupils and staff were well prepared for this, with technology already integral to teaching and learning. Leaders make useful checks that keep them well informed about pupils' engagement and progress. Pupils' project work with business partners now happens via video calls. This is helping to sustain important links with potential future employers.
- Leaders have thought carefully about whether off-site learning is safe and appropriate for all pupils. Leaders' work to strengthen the school's safeguarding culture is evident in the systems used to monitor pupils' well-being. Staff and pupils know how to stay safe while working online from home. Routines for reporting and acting on any emerging welfare concerns about pupils are fit for purpose.

- Where needed, pupils receive extra help to support their learning and well-being while working at home. Since the last inspection, training has helped staff to better support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff are well informed about pupils' particular needs. Useful systems help staff to identify and share strategies that help pupils with SEND to learn well.
- Leaders know that many Year 11 and 13 pupils have felt unsettled by uncertainty about how their learning will be assessed at the end of their courses. Staff have taken sensible steps to reassure pupils, helping to keep them focused on learning as being important in its own right.
- Since the last inspection, trustees have reflected on how they hold school leaders to account. This is particularly the case with regard to safeguarding arrangements. Trustees have changed their approach and strengthened their collective expertise where needed. They seek relevant information that assures them about pupils' safety and learning in the current context.
- Leaders make sensible use of support beyond the school. This helps them to manage the ongoing challenge of providing education during the pandemic. Work with neighbouring schools helps leaders respond to emerging priorities and needs in the local area. Links with other UTCs help leaders to consider how to address challenges that are specific to their setting. Ongoing work with the local authority is helping to improve safeguarding arrangements.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you and to other senior leaders and representatives of the board of trustees to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also spoke with groups of staff and looked at the arrangements for pupils to access learning remotely from home. We explored relevant aspects of the school's safeguarding arrangements. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 51 free-text responses, and 36 staff questionnaires. We also considered recent staff and parent surveys carried out by the school. We did not speak to any pupils, as none were working on the school site.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles
Her Majesty's Inspector