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Andrew Galbraith
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Dear Mr Galbraith

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Highfield Leadership Academy

Following my remote inspection with Sue Eastwood, 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 special measures.

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 require special measures at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in December 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.

Context

- Since the last monitoring inspection in February 2020, a new vice-principal and assistant principal have joined the school. Two governors have joined the local governing body.
- Approximately eight out of ten pupils were educated at home in the spring term before the school reopened to all pupils. Approximately three out of ten vulnerable pupils, and roughly one half of pupils with an education, health and care plan, were educated on site during this period.
- At the time of the inspection, almost all pupils were attending on site. A small number of pupils were self-isolating due to COVID-19. A very small proportion of pupils were reluctant to return to school. Following discussions with leaders, some of these pupils have now returned.

Main findings

- When the current national lockdown started, you quickly arranged remote education for those pupils who would be learning from home. Where possible, teachers delivered a curriculum that closely aligned with your new curriculum plans. You were delighted to welcome back all pupils from 8 March 2021. With minor adjustments, teachers continue to deliver the usual curriculum. This has helped to maintain continuity in pupils' education. It has also reduced the amount of lost learning.
- Before the pandemic, you had increased the breadth and ambition of the curriculum. Since then, subject leaders have focused on making further refinements to curriculum plans. They told inspectors that the pandemic has helped them to prioritise the most important knowledge that they want pupils to remember. You have increased your focus on improving the way that teachers deliver the curriculum. Teachers benefit from a range of training opportunities which have enhanced their understanding of different aspects of teaching, including those that are specific to the subjects that they teach.
- Pupils have mainly studied the usual curriculum during the current school year. Some subject leaders have made small changes to the order in which teachers deliver some topics. This is because they feel that some topics are best taught face to face. For example, teachers of religious education have delayed teaching the topic on evil and suffering because they consider it to be too sensitive to teach remotely. Teachers of practical subjects have made minor adaptations to the curriculum. For example, teachers of science have used demonstrations instead of some experiments.
- Teachers are checking how well pupils have learned and remembered the content that was taught remotely. Pupils completed formal assessments in

most subjects before the school reopened to all pupils. Teachers are using a range of strategies to address misconceptions they have identified. For example, teachers reteach some knowledge to full classes. They also direct pupils to online resources to help them revisit aspects of the curriculum they have not fully understood. Leaders have introduced many measures to support pupils in Year 11. For example, teachers run a range of remote revision sessions that take place in evenings and at weekends. These strategies are helping to strengthen the learning and improve the confidence of these pupils. Leaders are finalising their plans for assessing pupils in Year 11 for the rest of the school year.

- Earlier in the spring term, teachers taught 'live' lessons to pupils learning from home. These lessons aligned with pupils' normal timetables. Teachers delivered lessons in a way that resembled routine classroom teaching. For example, teachers used several mechanisms for checking pupils' understanding. They also used common approaches to explain new content to pupils. Pupils currently learning from home access the lessons that teachers deliver to pupils in school.
- Leaders have prioritised support for vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They have kept in close contact with these pupils and their families. This has enabled staff to respond to any challenges these pupils face in relation to their learning or well-being. Staff have amended the individual plans for all pupils with SEND. This has helped staff to meet these pupils' needs at the current time. Teachers use adaptive technologies to support pupils with sensory needs. They also teach in a way that supports the learning of pupils with SEND. For example, they break down instructions into small, manageable steps. They also create opportunities for pupils to receive one-to-one support if they feel they need it.
- Leaders have introduced several strategies to help pupils to become better readers. For example, they have introduced the 'Star Readers' initiative. This encourages pupils to read a diverse range of high-quality novels. They also support the weakest readers, including those with gaps in their phonic knowledge, through several online packages. Teachers focus on helping pupils to understand key words in their subject. These strategies are helping to improve pupils' access to the full curriculum.
- Members of the local governing body and leaders from the multi-academy trust have continued to support the school. They have held leaders to account for their actions to provide education during the pandemic, and to improve the school more widely. This includes leaders' work to develop the planning and delivery of the curriculum.
- Leaders from the multi-academy trust have gradually reduced the amount of support that they provide to the school. This is because they are confident

that recent improvements are secure. In the past, they have provided leaders with considerable support to develop the content of the curriculum.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior and middle leaders, a representative of the multi-academy trust, pupils, staff and representatives of the local governing body to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 19 free-text responses, and 42 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector