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Kieran Larkin
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Dear Mr Larkin

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Lowton Church of England High School

Following my remote inspection with Jonathan Smart, 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 require improvement.

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 has received four successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in June 2019.

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.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- implement and embed the new curriculum plans for each subject across key stages 3 and 4
- ensure that teachers and teaching assistants develop the knowledge and understanding of how to adapt the new curriculum for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Context

- Since the last inspection, 15 members of staff have left the school. Governors have appointed 21 new members of staff. Newly appointed staff include: you; a senior pastoral leader; subject leaders of mathematics, art and design and modern foreign languages; and a lead practitioner for science.
- Several staff have been promoted internally, including two new directors of learning and a lead practitioner for mathematics. The previous acting headteacher returned to their position of substantive deputy headteacher in September 2020.
- A new staff governor was appointed in December 2020.
- Across the autumn term 2020, all pupils needed to learn from home for short periods of time due to self-isolation. Pupils in Years 8 and 11 have had to self-isolate more than others.
- At the time of this inspection, approximately one tenth of pupils were being educated on site. Almost half of the vulnerable pupils and seven tenths of the pupils with an education, health and care plan were attending school.

Main findings

- Since your appointment, you and other senior leaders have continued to develop the curriculum to ensure that it is ambitious for all pupils. Moving forward, you, governors and other leaders have a strong vision for the curriculum. You have also streamlined the key priorities required to improve the school further. You are taking the necessary actions to provide education in the current circumstances.
- Without doubt, the pandemic has hampered the pace of curriculum development. However, it has given subject leaders and teachers considerable time to review their curriculums. Consequently, staff are well on the way to ensuring that curriculum plans clearly define the core knowledge that pupils need to know and remember. Although subject leaders are at different stages with this, they are ready to implement their initial curriculum plans once pupils return to school in March 2021.

- You and other leaders have carefully considered your approach to providing remote education. You have responded to feedback from pupils, parents and carers and adapted your offer accordingly. Whether pupils are learning from home or on site, teachers are adapting the curriculum effectively. Teachers have successfully modified face-to-face classroom learning so that pupils continue to benefit from an education during these testing times.
- Despite the impact of the third national lockdown, you and the leadership team are taking care to prepare pupils in Year 11 for the next stage of their education, employment or training. You have ensured that pupils in Year 11 continue with their usual examination subjects. Subject leaders are making the necessary adaptations to the content of the curriculum so that pupils have the required knowledge to progress onto post-16 courses. Pupils in Year 11 are receiving effective careers education, information, advice and guidance.
- There are clear processes in place to identify and support the weakest readers. As such, these pupils receive regular specialist teaching to develop their phonic knowledge. This is having a positive effect on helping the weakest readers to catch up. That said, the continuity of this support has been hindered by the pandemic. Upon pupils' return to school, leaders and teachers have appropriate plans in place to identify those who have fallen further behind in reading.
- You and other leaders have many strategies in place to ensure that your most vulnerable pupils are attending school. Leaders' successful work with families has improved the attendance of these pupils over time. Pupils said that they value the support that they receive from staff. Leaders work closely with external agencies to ensure that these pupils continue to receive the timely support that they need. Pupils' safety is paramount to all staff at the school. As such, staff make daily contact with vulnerable pupils who are learning at home.
- Leaders have acted judiciously to improve the leadership of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Changes to the leadership of SEND is increasing the effectiveness of teachers' work with these pupils, whether they are in school or being taught remotely. Pupils with SEND continue to benefit from strong multi-agency support. However, some teachers and teaching assistants do not have enough knowledge and understanding of how to adapt the newly planned curriculum so that pupils with SEND flourish.
- Governors have taken decisive action to strengthen the leadership of the school. This has contributed to the recent increased trajectory of improvement. Governors' renewed vision for the school, coupled with the determined leadership of you and the leadership team, have begun to promote change. Your openness and transparency enable governors to be more strategic in their role. Consequently, governors are holding you and

other leaders to account more effectively, including during the current circumstances.

- You have sought a range of external support from the local authority and a national leader of education. This support has helped subject leaders to review their curriculum plans. You and other leaders are also engaging with an externally accredited leadership programme. This has improved communication across the school and the quality of leadership at all levels.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke with you, your deputy headteacher, other senior leaders and members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. We held meetings with a selection of middle leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, groups of pupils and representatives from the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We reviewed examples of remote education and samples of pupils' work. We looked at 118 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 54 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Goodwin
Her Majesty's Inspector