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Matthew Little
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Dear Mr Little

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Darwen Vale High School

Following my remote inspection with Janet Hallett, 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 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 March 2020.

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:

- ensure the plans in all subjects clearly state the knowledge pupils need to learn so that they can make progress through the curriculum and address any gaps that have developed during the pandemic.

Context

- Since the last inspection, you have appointed a new head of faculty for science as well as subject specialists in modern foreign languages and humanities.
- In the first part of the spring term, approximately nine out of 10 pupils were educated at home. Around half of vulnerable pupils and pupils with education, health and care plans were attending on site.
- At the time of this inspection, over nine out of every 10 pupils were being educated on site. About one tenth of pupils across different year groups were self-isolating or shielding. They were being educated remotely.

Main findings

- You and your leadership team have put an online system in place that allows pupils to access lessons when they are learning remotely. When the school was only open to some pupils due to COVID-19 restrictions, teachers delivered lessons, set tasks and collected pupils' work via this system. Pupils received feedback on their work. Now that most pupils have returned to school, teachers continue to provide the same remote education for those pupils who are learning from home.
- You have a clear vision for the curriculum that meets the needs of pupils in the school. With support from the trust, subject leaders have developed their curriculum plans. Most of these plans help pupils build on what they already know and prepare them for the next step in their learning. This is not the case in all subjects. Leaders have recruited staff with subject expertise to support the delivery of the curriculum. Leaders have also ensured there is enough time for pupils to learn the subject knowledge they will need for later learning.
- Teachers continued to deliver their planned curriculum despite the move to remote education during the pandemic. They made some changes to the order of topics to suit online working and to maintain a COVID-19 safe environment in school. As a result, pupils have continued with their planned learning once the school reopened to everyone.
- Leaders and teachers have planned ways to find out what pupils have remembered of their prior learning. They do this during lessons and through work set for pupils to do on their own. This is an important part of lessons

now that most pupils have returned to school. Teachers use their findings from these checks to plan future learning. For example, teachers are checking pupils' memory of vocabulary and reteaching words that pupils have forgotten.

- Leaders have a programme in place to support pupils in Year 11 with their applications to sixth forms, colleges and apprenticeships. All pupils in Year 11 receive one-to-one guidance meetings with an independent careers adviser. These meetings took place online when pupils were not in school. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have an extended school day from Monday to Friday and this time is being used to help them catch up on subject content they have missed. Many pupils have taken up the opportunity to attend additional lessons on Saturdays.
- Leaders are ambitious for vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They made sure that all these pupils had support with their learning during the period when the school was only open to some pupils due to COVID-19 restrictions. Teachers have accurate records of the work pupils completed. They are now reviewing this work and planning to go over things pupils have not understood. Annual reviews for pupils with SEND took place online. Leaders continue to access many support services. Support that was interrupted due to the pandemic is now up and running again. This means pupils and their families are able to access the help that they need.
- Leaders have systems in place to identify pupils who struggle with reading. These pupils can access an appropriate reading programme whether they are back in school or continuing their studies at home. Reading is a priority for all teachers in the school and they plan lessons so that pupils can learn key vocabulary in their subjects. This is helping these pupils to catch up.
- Governors know the school well. They are aware of leaders' strategies to improve pupils' attendance in school. Leaders and governors have put a clear system in place to check the work of teachers.
- Trust leaders have worked with leaders in the school to bring about changes in the curriculum. They worked with subject leaders to plan the curriculum and they oversee the work of leaders in the school and offer them support. For example, there are regular meetings between the principals of all the trust schools.

Evidence

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

We also carried out remote visits to lessons and scrutinised documents provided by leaders. We looked at 68 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 49 free-text responses, and 69 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector