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Trevor Scott  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Scott

### **Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Castlewood School**

Following my remote inspection with Sam Ingram, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 24 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 November 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:

- review and develop curriculum planning so that it builds successfully on pupils' prior knowledge
- ensure that clear plans are developed to check on the impact of the revised curriculum on pupils' achievement
- ensure that phonics sessions are targeted specifically to those key stage 3 pupils who need them.

### **Context**

- The school joined The Manor Hall Academy Trust in September 2020. A new assistant headteacher of the upper school has been appointed. Two additional governors have joined the local governing body.
- The school was open to all pupils at the start of the spring term. All pupils at the school have education, health and care plans. At the start of term, roughly half the pupils attended on site. By the time all schools fully reopened, two thirds of the pupils at Castlewood were attending on site.
- Almost all pupils were attending on site at the time of this inspection. A very small number of pupils who are living in complex situations were not attending. Staff are supporting these pupils remotely.
- At the time of the inspection, four members of staff were absent due to COVID-19-related issues. Leaders are managing the situation well by sensibly reorganising workloads.

### **Main findings**

- Leaders, governors and staff have worked well as a team to provide education in the current circumstances. Despite the need to cover the work of absent colleagues, staff feel very positive about the support they get from leaders, and they are proud to work at the school. Parents and carers speak very highly of the school.
- Leaders had carefully thought out what they intended to achieve with their curriculum offer by the start of the pandemic. They responded positively to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They created detailed overviews of the curriculum intent for each subject, within each key stage. However, plans to develop the curriculum further were stalled. This was partly due to uncertainty with the timing of the transition to the new trust. It was also a result of rightly adjusting priorities to respond to the challenges of providing education and keeping pupils safe and well during the pandemic.

- The curriculum places a strong emphasis on pupils' development and well-being. Careers guidance is personalised for individual pupils. The impact of this can be seen by the fact that all pupils in Year 11 have successfully gained college placements.
- The key stage 2 curriculum plans are at the earliest stages of development. The content and sequencing of the curriculum in all subjects across all phases of the school have yet to be reviewed. Leaders agreed that the plans have not been sufficiently developed to make sure that they build on pupils' prior knowledge.
- Leaders undertook monitoring activities to make sure that all pupils were receiving an education during the spring term. You agree that a more detailed range of checks need to be made when your curriculum plans are implemented, to evaluate their impact on pupils' learning and achievement.
- Developing reading remains a high priority in the school. Plans show that staff expose pupils to a wide range of literature. You are pleased that programmes you have put in place to support comprehension are having a positive impact on pupils' engagement and enjoyment of reading.
- Leaders have rightly identified a need to provide phonics sessions for pupils in Years 7 and 8. They have carefully selected a programme that engages pupils and makes learning enjoyable. However, leaders do not currently check to make sure that these sessions are targeted at the pupils who need them.
- Staff continued their usual checks on pupils' learning throughout the period when schools were only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions, whether pupils were on site or at home. When all pupils returned to school, they were given a range of assessments to assess both academic attainment and mental health and well-being. The outcomes of these tests are informing teachers' planning.
- Pastoral leaders work alongside other staff to ensure that the school supports individual pupils' needs. Leaders are insightful in their understanding of the needs of their most vulnerable pupils, some of whom are living in extremely challenging circumstances. You truly offer a personalised approach for these pupils. For example, pupils benefit from one-to-one sessions with a mechanic, if this is something they aspire to be.
- Governors are knowledgeable about the school and its priorities. For example, they have made plans to increase their oversight of the curriculum as it is implemented. They value the support from the trust in quality assuring the work of the school and holding leaders to account. The trust is supporting leaders in developing their self-evaluation processes. For example, the trust has launched an 'effective teacher programme' to help teachers evaluate their own work.

## **Evidence**

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, teachers, the chair of the governing body and the trust's school improvement manager to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also sampled online lessons and other aspects of the school's curriculum offer. We scrutinised curriculum documentation. We looked at 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 31 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Dollner  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**