

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231  
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19 March 2021

Andrea English  
Executive Headteacher  
Croft Community School  
Greencroft Road End  
Annfield Plain  
Stanley  
DH9 8PR

Dear Mrs English

### **Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Croft Community School**

Following my remote inspection with Mark Smith, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 18 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 December 2017.

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:

- address any gaps in pupils' learning that have been identified from assessments
- develop and implement the plans for additional vocational subjects in the secondary phase
- continue to embed subject knowledge in curriculum plans.

### **Context**

- Croft Community School is a community special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and/or autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
- Since the first monitoring inspection in December 2018, staffing has been generally stable. There have been no changes in leadership roles. Three governors left at the end of their term of office. They have not been replaced because governors had planned to reduce the size of the governing body.
- Just over a quarter of pupils were educated at home during the spring term 2021 before the school re-opened fully in March 2021.
- At the time of the inspection, almost all pupils were being educated on site. One class 'bubble' and other pupils who share the bubble's transport to school were being educated remotely.

### **Main findings**

- Leaders have worked hard to put pupils' needs first in the current circumstances. Throughout the pandemic, leaders have set high expectations for all pupils and continued their work to prepare pupils for adult life. They have directed the federation's resources effectively and developed the curriculum so that it excites and motivates pupils. Responses from staff and parents and carers to the surveys recognise leaders' aspirations, the improvements in the school and the positive impact of these on pupils.
- At the time of the start of the pandemic, subject leaders had reviewed and developed their curriculum plans. Subject plans have a clear purpose and link together well to ensure that pupils can build on their prior learning. In some subjects, there is an overemphasis on developing skills rather than subject-specific knowledge. In the secondary phase, leaders have increased the range of subjects and qualifications to meet pupils' needs and interests. Leaders' plans to introduce more vocational subjects were delayed by COVID-19 restrictions.

- Leaders provided remote education during the spring term 2021 restrictions. This continues now for pupils isolating at home. Pupils have a mixture of live lessons from staff in school and pre-recorded lessons and tasks. Leaders ensure that any barriers to remote learning are removed. For example, they often send paper copies of work home because pupils and parents prefer this. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance and engagement in remote learning carefully. They have also increased the support available for pupils' mental health and well-being
- During the spring term 2021, in the early years and primary phases, staff met weekly to plan ahead. Most subject content was taught as far as possible. Staff worked hard to ensure that resources and materials were sent home to pupils to enable them to continue to develop their knowledge. In the secondary phase, leaders made changes to practical aspects in physical education and extra-curricular activities. Otherwise, leaders focused on maintaining continuity for pupils and kept changes to a minimum.
- Now pupils have returned to school, staff are assessing pupils in all subjects to find out what subject content they have learned and remembered. Leaders are planning to adapt the curriculum to make sure that pupils have all the knowledge they need for their future learning. For example, leaders plan to give pupils opportunities to practise using mathematical measuring instruments.
- Leaders continue to improve the planning and implementation of the reading curriculum across the school. Staff are trained in the phonics system and pupils' reading is carefully checked and monitored as they move up the school. Pupils can apply their phonics knowledge and develop reading fluency. Leaders have ensured that a wide range of reading activities, such as story time, continued remotely for pupils.
- Leaders' strong focus on pupils' preparation for adult life has continued throughout the pandemic. For Year 11, leaders have been determined to maintain pupils' motivation. Careers advice, annual reviews of pupils' EHC plans and visits to colleges and providers have continued remotely.
- Governors support school leaders and hold them to account effectively. Governors have met remotely during the pandemic to scrutinise leaders' decisions about managing the impact of COVID-19 on pupils, as well as curriculum development. Governors know the school well and what needs to happen next to fully embed the improvements.
- The support from external agencies has been strong throughout the pandemic. Leaders said that sometimes remote working has had a positive impact. For example, there has been better attendance at the annual reviews of pupils' EHC plans. Leaders and staff actively participate in, and contribute

to, training across the federation and local authority. There are effective systems for sharing professional knowledge across the school.

### **Evidence**

This inspection was conducted remotely. We met with you and your senior team, the chair of the governing body and the chairs of the governing body committees. These discussions focused on leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We met with leaders responsible for reading and listened to pupils read. We also scrutinised a sample of subject plans and some examples of pupils' work. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 16 free-text responses, and 43 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 Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Hallett  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**