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Peter Higgins
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Dear Mr Higgins

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Heathlands Primary Academy

Following my remote inspection with Mark Howes, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 23 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 September 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:

- support pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, who have got out of practice with their writing and arithmetic
- refine foundation subject curriculum plans further to identify the core knowledge that pupils need to know as they move through the school, and ensure assessment checks the right things.

Context

- The school's leadership and staff remain unchanged since the previous inspection.
- Between the start of the spring term and 5 March 2021, all pupils received remote education at some point. Typically, the proportion ranged between 80% and 90%. This included the very few pupils who have an education, health and care plan. During the same period, most pupils identified as being vulnerable continued to attend school.
- At the time of this inspection, Year 4 pupils were being educated remotely because of COVID-19.

Main findings

- In the months following the September 2019 inspection, school leaders pressed on with improvements to the wider curriculum. Plans in subjects such as history and geography were revised to include more details about what pupils needed to learn in different year groups. In addition, staff training helped to strengthen subject leadership. Consequently, by the time the pandemic arrived, the school had already improved the curriculum offer.
- These improvements have helped the school to provide meaningful education during the period when schools were only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions. This term, until 8 March 2021, the remote education offer included the school's usual subjects and provided clear guidance about what to do. Staff kept in regular contact with home to check on pupils' progress, their well-being and whereabouts. Furthermore, teachers provided pupils with feedback and guidance on how to keep on top of their learning and stay healthy. In their comments to Ofsted, parents and pupils expressed positive views about how remote education was managed.
- This organised approach to remote learning enabled the school to respond quickly when it was necessary for Year 4 pupils to return to remote education this week. Familiar systems and clear-cut expectations mean that everyone knows what to expect and pupils continue to learn.

- The school's systematic approach to teaching phonics and daily routines for reading, for example, have supported pupils throughout the pandemic. Pupils have continued to enjoy listening to stories, have had access to books and have engaged with reading tasks. Recent checks show that most pupils have kept up with reading.
- Staff are also checking what pupils know in other subjects. Some of these assessments are based on teachers' observations and some on tests. In mathematics, staff have found that some pupils' knowledge of arithmetic, particularly multiplication and division, has slipped. In response, they have adjusted curriculum plans to focus on these aspects. Where needed, pupils receive additional support, either in small groups or in one-to-one sessions outside of the main class. Pupils' writing has also taken a dip. Some pupils have got out of practice and staff are reminding them about previous learning and expectations. Staff are also setting tasks that build up pupils' stamina for writing at length.
- In the foundation subjects, the school's curriculum plans set out the content to be covered in different topics and year groups. That said, the core knowledge that pupils need to know and when could be made even clearer. Once this is set out clearly, leaders will be better placed to strengthen assessment in these subjects. Currently, assessment in foundation subjects focuses more on what has been taught than on what pupils know. This is a helpful check on content coverage but is less useful for checking whether pupils actually know more and have made progress. This inspection found that leaders are aware of this and are on the case.
- Throughout the period when schools were only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions, leaders ensured that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities continued to access specialist support when needed, with some provided online. Staff are attentive to pupils who may be anxious about returning to the classroom and have in-school support available.
- The local governing body asks the right questions and is informed about the school's work. Governors know that the current priorities are to settle pupils back into school, get them active, and back on track with their learning. They have met regularly throughout the pandemic to steer decision-making and keep an eye on everyone's welfare.
- The trust has supported leaders with policy matters and in practical ways, such as supplying laptops to pupils. Across the trust, there are subject leader networks that enable staff to share and learn from effective practice. These, and input from an executive headteacher and an external education advisory service, have served to improve curriculum leadership and the quality of education across the school.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer of The University of Wolverhampton Multi Academy Trust (UWMAT), an executive headteacher who works across five schools in UWMAT, teaching staff, pupils, and the chair and two governors from the local governing body to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also looked at information on the school's website and curriculum plans. We observed a reading session. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 41 free-text responses, and 39 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 UWMAT, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector