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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Tracey Burnside
Headteacher
Whittington Green School
High Street
Old Whittington
Chesterfield
Derbyshire
S41 9LG

Dear Mrs Burnside

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Whittington Green School

Following my remote inspection with Chris Davies, 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 four successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in October 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 ensure that:

- curriculum plans are at least as ambitious as the key stage 3 national curriculum and include the specific knowledge that pupils need to know and when they need to learn it, starting with Year 7
- teachers use information about pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to ensure that these pupils are supported to learn the curriculum successfully
- pupils, particularly older ones, are given the support they need to read well.

Context

- A new head of English was appointed in January 2021. A new governor, appointed by the local authority, has joined the governing body since the previous inspection.
- Around four fifths of pupils were educated at home when the school was closed to most pupils at the start of the spring term. About three quarters of vulnerable pupils and half of those with education health and care plans were attending school on site at this time.
- At the time of this inspection, most pupils were attending school on site.

Main findings

- Leaders have reviewed the curriculum since the previous inspection. In some subjects, the curriculum is well planned. Subject teams work together closely to agree the important knowledge that pupils need to learn. For example, in physical education (PE), leaders have broken down the technical knowledge that pupils must know for the skills they learn, such as throwing a javelin. Pupils revisit relevant learning when practising other skills, such as playing basketball. In other subjects, curriculum plans do not focus precisely enough on the essential knowledge that pupils need. The plans do not identify exactly what pupils must know, starting in Year 7, so that pupils can build on this in future years.
- Pupils make their options choices at the end of Year 8. They continue to study a range of subjects in Year 9. However, the curriculum is not ambitious enough in the subjects that pupils decide not to study at key stage 4. In English, key stage 3 curriculum plans do not provide a firm basis for GCSE studies. Leaders have implemented new English curriculum plans recently. These plans follow a logical order and are more closely matched to the national curriculum.

- Leaders have reordered their curriculum plans, particularly in subjects that involve practical work. If specialist rooms are not available, teachers use demonstrations or adapt the tasks, so that pupils do not miss crucial knowledge. Teachers help pupils remember important facts, for instance by using rhymes in science to recall different types of cell division. They regularly check whether pupils' previous learning is secure. In modern foreign languages (MFL), pupils' responses to questions at the start of lessons inform teachers' planning. Younger pupils have completed formal assessments in reading and mathematics, to help leaders identify whether any need support.
- Leaders encourage pupils' love of reading. During the most recent national lockdown, leaders delivered books to pupils at home. Each week, pupils read with their peers during tutor time and those in Years 7 and 8 have a dedicated reading lesson. Leaders plan to appoint the school's first librarian soon. Support for pupils who struggle to read is not always effective. Younger pupils' book choices do not always match their reading ability. Older pupils do not get the help they need to become fluent readers.
- Leaders identify pupils with SEND accurately. They provide teachers with more detailed information than previously about these pupils' needs. However, leaders do not check consistently that teachers use this information effectively. Some curriculum plans lack ambition for these pupils. Staff provide some pupils with SEND with additional support. This help is currently more limited than usual due to the present circumstances.
- Leaders have clear plans in place to prepare Year 11 pupils for their end-of-course assessments. Pupils have completed most of their courses, giving them time to review aspects they find challenging. Year 11 pupils feel well supported by their teachers. Typically, those we spoke with have made plans for the next stage of their education or training.
- A small number of pupils continue to learn at home. Most of these pupils access live online lessons as they are being delivered in school. These pupils receive the same curriculum as their peers.
- Governors are committed to the school. Links with individual departments give them a detailed understanding of leaders' actions to review and improve the curriculum. They know how leaders are planning to get the curriculum back on track following the most recent national lockdown. Governors have delayed responding to a recent review of governance due to the pandemic.
- Local authority advisers provide senior leaders and governors with regular challenge and support. Links with a range of local schools are helping leaders to develop their curriculum plans. Training for staff in the SEND team is starting to improve the provision for pupils with SEND. Further training for senior and middle leaders is due to begin soon.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and the deputy SENCo. We met with curriculum leaders for English, MFL and PE. We held a discussion with a group of pupils and observed two pupils reading to a member of staff. We spoke with a representative of the local authority. We held a meeting with two members of the governing body, including the chair, to discuss leaders' action to provide education to all pupils in the current circumstances.

We considered information about the curriculum. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 20 free-text responses, and 40 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 Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff
Her Majesty's Inspector