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Paul Yeomans
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Dear Mr Yeomans

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Springfield House Community Special School

Following my remote inspection with Ian Tustian, 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 special measures.

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 was judged to require special measures at its previous section 5 inspection. 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 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:

- improve the skills of leaders at all levels so that the school is less reliant on external support
- continue to develop the curriculum, ensuring that in both its design and delivery, subject-specific aspects are given sufficient emphasis.

Context

- The executive headteacher left the school in August 2020.
- The school used to be federated with Lindsworth School. The federation was dissolved in October 2020.
- You joined the school as acting headteacher in November 2020.
- The interim executive board (IEB) replaced the governing body in January 2021.
- An assistant headteacher has joined the school, seconded from the multi-academy trust (MAT) that is supporting the school. An educational consultant works in the school for two days each week. New leaders of early reading and mathematics have been appointed.
- Approximately 45% of pupils were educated on-site between the start of January and 5 March 2021. All pupils have education, health and care plans and all are vulnerable.
- At the time of this inspection, almost all pupils were attending on site.
- At the time of this inspection, 6% of staff were absent due to COVID-19.

Main findings

- The school has been through turbulent times since its last inspection, just one week before the first national lockdown. Several factors, including the process of defederation and the impact of COVID-19, have slowed the school's improvement. Consequently, several improvement strategies are at early stages of implementation. However, improvement is now evident, and you are successfully providing education for all pupils.

- You have provided stability and clear leadership since your appointment and you have addressed some of the most pressing issues identified at the last inspection. Most staff are positive about working in the school and are committed to seeing it improve further. You use external support well to strengthen leadership at all levels. However, the school relies heavily on this support at the moment. You are working towards reducing leaders' reliance on external support.
- You have been successful in encouraging almost all pupils to return to school following the most recent lockdown. Staff are rightly focusing on re-establishing routines and expectations so that pupils are ready to learn. Thus, ensuring that the improvements in behaviour, that you had made prior to the lockdown, are not lost.
- Leaders have revised the curriculum since the last inspection. All pupils study a full range of subjects except a foreign language. You intend to introduce a language to the curriculum later this year. You have purchased commercial work schemes for all subjects and teachers are beginning to use these now. This is a sensible strategy to ensure that pupils' learning is logically organised. However, you are aware that staff will need to amend these schemes as time goes on to reflect the needs of your pupils. Leaders are working closely with staff to begin this process.
- Leaders are also introducing a set of six expectations of effective teaching for teachers to put in place in lessons. However, these currently make no reference to aspects that are specific to individual subjects. Consequently, although the curriculum's design places sufficient emphasis on subject-specific knowledge, expectations of its implementation do not.
- The teaching of reading was identified as a weakness in the last inspection report. Improving the teaching of reading, particularly phonics, has been a key school priority for several months and there is evidence of improvement. This area is led well. The school has invested in new resources, for example reading books now match pupils' ability to decode words. All teachers and teaching assistants have been trained to teach phonics and put their training into practice during the autumn term of 2020. As a result of these actions, your assessment information shows that most pupils' reading improved considerably over the autumn term. Staff are currently checking on how the latest lockdown has affected pupils' reading.
- At the time of this inspection, you were providing remote education for a very small number of pupils. You were using the same system as during the most recent lockdown as this had proved successful. You provide pupils with individualised work, covering the whole curriculum, using a combination of online and paper-based resources.

- The IEB has been in place for just six weeks and has met once. Its members are suitably experienced and qualified. They are ambitious for the school. However, it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of the current governance arrangements.
- Support and challenge commissioned by the local authority, including that provided by a MAT, are beginning to show evidence of positive impact. For example, behaviour has improved. The use of physical intervention has decreased, and no pupils have been excluded this year. Similarly, external support has contributed to the improvement in the teaching of reading.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, the chair of the IEB and representatives of the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also reviewed reports written by those providing support and challenge to leaders at this time. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including six free-text responses, and 15 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector