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Tracy Hush
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Dear Ms Hush

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Berwick Academy

Following my remote inspection with Jayne Ashman, 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 January 2018.

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:

- further develop leaders' and trustees' understanding of the effectiveness of remote education so that leaders have a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses to inform its future use
- enhance the curriculum so that it better meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Context

- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership team. The headteacher, previously in role as acting headteacher, was substantively appointed to the post in March 2019. A deputy headteacher has left the school. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2020. An assistant headteacher and associate senior leader have joined the leadership team. New directors of learning have been appointed in English, mathematics, humanities and design technology. Two new trustees were appointed in January 2021 and a new member joined the trust board in February 2021.
- In the spring term 2021, 88% of pupil were educated at home. Approximately 65% of vulnerable pupils were attending on site. In addition, 50% of pupils with an education, health and care plan were educated on site.
- At the time of the inspection, 96% of pupils were attending on site.

Main findings

- Leaders have developed curriculum plans to focus on the knowledge and skills that pupils need to acquire over time. These plans were revised over the autumn term. Leaders used a mixture of formal tests and ongoing assessment methods to check what pupils had learned. This led to changes, such as increased time for number work in mathematics. Leaders made further adaptations to curriculum plans in the spring term when the majority of pupils were working from home.
- Leaders have placed an increasing emphasis on pupils' mental health and well-being. They plan to refamiliarise pupils with school systems and routines to build on the improvements in behaviour they saw in the autumn term. Leaders will continue to use a range of assessment processes to identify areas where the curriculum needs to be strengthened. Leaders plan to do this in a measured way so that pupils are not burdened by too much assessment.
- Leaders have developed a system of remote education. They have checked that pupils have access to appropriate technology. They have provided pupils with access to a timetable of online lessons and materials. These lessons are

supported by commentaries and demonstrations. As far as possible, these lessons follow the school's usual curriculum. Pupils have opportunities to submit work and receive feedback. Leaders are confident that this system will support any future occasions when pupils may need to work from home.

- Leaders' overview of remote education is less assured. For example, in the spring term, they did not show a clear awareness of pupils' engagement and attendance in different subjects. In discussion, pupils expressed concern that they had received much less feedback on their work in some subjects compared with others.
- Leaders are encouraging pupils in Year 11 and in the sixth form to continue to focus on their chosen subjects. They have made pupils and their parents and carers aware of what needs to be studied. They are providing pupils with careers guidance to support their next steps in education and training.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have increased support for pupils who need help with reading. Leaders have built on the success they reported from previous initiatives. They provide one-to-one and small group reading support. The reading programme was also delivered to pupils when they were working at home. Leaders have continued to promote wider reading through the 'Berwick Reads' programme. They have received favourable responses on this initiative. Teachers are also helping pupils to understand vocabulary in their subjects. The timing of some of these initiatives has been disrupted because of the effect of COVID-19.
- Leaders have increased contact with parents of pupils with SEND to better meet pupils' needs. Teaching assistants have provided extra support for pupils at school and at home. Leaders' actions to ensure that the taught curriculum regularly meets the needs of pupils with SEND are much less developed.
- The board of trustees has recently appointed two practising senior leaders to the board. This has enhanced trustees' ability to check school leaders' actions to provide education at this time. They ask how the needs of vulnerable pupils are being met. They talk to leaders to seek assurance on the curriculum. They regularly check the work of leaders in ensuring that pupils are safe. Trustees have less detailed knowledge of how remote education has been assured at this time.
- The school improvement partner has worked with school leaders to support curriculum development and the subject expertise of middle leaders. Additional funding from the ONE Vision project has brought extra capacity to school leadership. This is supporting actions to improve the curriculum and pupils' behaviour. The local authority has provided additional support for pupils with SEND. Some of the work to support the school has been interrupted by the effect of COVID-19.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with senior leaders to discuss actions to provide education to all pupils at this time. We also talked to curriculum leaders and a group of school staff. We held meetings with three members of the board of trustees. We talked to two groups of pupils. We also talked to the school improvement partner from a local academy trust who has been providing additional support.

We considered 35 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 52 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including 35 free-text responses.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector