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Sarah Took  
Headteacher  
The Meadows School  
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Dear Miss Took

### **Additional, remote monitoring inspection of The Meadows School**

Following my remote inspection with Marc White, 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 June 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 ensure that:

- all staff and governors have a shared understanding of the curriculum's aims, and that this informs further planning and development
- all teaching staff have deep knowledge and understanding of how to teach early reading, including phonics.

## **Context**

- The school continues to provide education for secondary-aged pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- One teacher left the school in July 2020 and another teacher joined in September 2020.
- Around one in ten pupils were educated at home at the start of the spring term 2021. All of the school's most vulnerable pupils attended on-site provision during this time.
- A small handful of pupils are continuing their education remotely. Some of these pupils are attending school on a part-time basis, as part of their transition back into full-time education.
- Around one in ten staff were absent from school at the time of the inspection. Some of these absences are long term. A supply teacher is covering some of the duties of absent staff. Leaders and other staff are covering the remaining work, alongside their usual duties.

## **Main findings**

- Leaders and governors have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. For example, you have adapted the curriculum so that there is more emphasis on spelling, punctuation and grammar. The school has been open throughout the recent partial closure of schools, with a high proportion of pupils continuing to attend on site throughout this time.
- You have taken appropriate action to review the school's curriculum and are continuing to work on developing it further. The curriculum is built around 'the big 4'. These are a set of aims designed to be easy for pupils to remember and work towards. You have also reviewed the way the curriculum is delivered. Pupils in Year 7 are taught together. The rest of the pupils start each day working in 'vertical' tutor groups for literacy and numeracy – that is, pupils from Year 8 to Year 11 are in the same tutor groups and learn together for these subjects.

- Curriculum plans show that leaders and staff have thought carefully about what should be taught and when. This is improving the quality of the curriculum. Pupils told us that they really enjoy subjects such as physical education, mathematics, science and enterprise. Some staff and governors do not have a strong enough understanding of the school's curriculum and what it is intended to achieve.
- Leaders see reading as a key curriculum priority. You have improved the way that reading is taught and you are starting to see the results of this. For example, you have introduced a structured programme for teaching phonics. This is having a positive impact. Some staff have been trained in the use of this method and are knowledgeable about how to teach early reading. Other staff have not yet had this training.
- Teachers have assessed pupils to see what they have learned and remembered of the curriculum they have been taught. You have found that there is no commonality in this. Different pupils have different gaps in their knowledge and understanding. As a result, the curriculum is being adapted on an individual basis to meet pupils' specific needs.
- In Year 11, leaders have focused on subject content that is essential for pupils' qualifications, so that they can be successful in their next steps. Leaders and staff are working closely with pupils to ensure that they are able to achieve a qualification, at the appropriate level, in each of the subjects that they learn about.
- Most pupils are in school and remote education is currently being offered to a very small number of pupils. The remote provision matches the school's normal curriculum, with some minor adaptations. Pupils' engagement is monitored daily.
- Some pupils have additional special educational needs, such as autism spectrum disorder. You have found that many of these pupils have become more anxious as a result of the pandemic. You have put specific measures in place to support individual pupils, as necessary.
- Governors know the school well and are dedicated to the staff and pupils. They meet with you regularly, and support and challenge you well.
- The local authority's adviser meets with you regularly. The local authority has provided effective support and challenge to the school throughout the pandemic. This has been both about matters related to the pandemic and about other key issues. For example, the local authority is continuing to provide support with your ongoing development of the curriculum.

## **Evidence**

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, pupils, representatives of those responsible for governance, and a representative of the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also looked at school documents and listened to pupils reading with staff. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 12 free-text responses, and 28 questionnaires for staff.

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

Wendy Varney  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**