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Helen Cullen
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Dear Mrs Cullen

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Sexey's School

Following my remote inspection with Simon Rowe, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 2 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 have serious weaknesses.

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 have serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in March 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 the school's approach to assessing pupils' learning pays sufficient attention to the need for pupils to build up key knowledge as they move through the curriculum in each subject.

Context

- Since the previous monitoring inspection in January 2020, the school has internally appointed a new deputy headteacher. A new assistant headteacher for teaching and learning was appointed in January 2021. The school also appointed a new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) in April 2020 and a new designated safeguarding lead in October 2020.
- Arrangements are under way for the school to join the Quantock Education Trust.
- In the autumn term of 2020, approximately 30% of pupils had to be educated remotely, either at home or in one of the boarding houses, while they awaited the outcome of COVID-19 tests.
- Just over 5% of the school's pupils are currently being educated on site, approximately half of whom are boarders. Fifty per cent of pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans are being educated on site along with virtually all the pupils in other vulnerable groups.

Main findings

- You, your senior leaders and other staff show a continuing determination to provide pupils with a meaningful education during the disruption caused by COVID-19. Staff demonstrate a commitment to reflect on what has gone well, both for pupils on site and those learning remotely, and to refine their work in light of this.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the work the school is doing and how its response to COVID-19 has evolved over time. They have played a significant role in this process through the strategic oversight they provide. Governors bring a level of commitment and expertise that is helping the school to respond to the challenges presented by the pandemic.
- Leaders have made appropriate adaptations to the curriculum in response to the current circumstances. Pupils continue to study all the subjects they would usually be doing. Indeed, the curriculum has been broadened by the introduction of geology at A level. Photography is now part of the curriculum across the school, not just in the sixth form. A small number of pupils have also studied for qualifications in functional skills in English and mathematics, when leaders judge this to be appropriate for these pupils' needs.

- Since the previous monitoring inspection in January 2020, leaders' work on reviewing the curriculum has continued. Leaders are aiming to provide pupils with a coherent curriculum that runs from Year 7 to Year 13, although this work needs to be embedded further. Nonetheless, leaders' plans show that this work is already having a positive impact on ensuring the curriculum is well sequenced and contains appropriate content.
- You have created a shared approach to teaching that is well understood by staff at all levels. Leaders have successfully transferred this approach to providing education during the current circumstances. Whether on the school site or at home, pupils follow their usual timetable. You have recently refined your approach here, in response to feedback from pupils, parents and staff. At least two thirds of pupils' time is now spent in 'live' lessons delivered remotely, with the other time being spent conducting independent study, with support on hand if necessary.
- The school's use of assessment is less well developed. You want to create a common approach to assessment across all subjects. In key stages 3 and 4, the school uses GCSE grade descriptors and assessment objectives across all year groups from Year 7 upwards. However, this approach risks placing too little emphasis on the specific subject content pupils need to learn in each year.
- The school places a priority on developing pupils' love of books and helping those pupils who need to catch up in reading. All pupils in Years 7 and 8 have a dedicated reading lesson in their timetable. Pupils also regularly listen to their teachers read to them during tutor periods. Leaders consciously link this to developing cultural capital by widening pupils' experience of authors from different backgrounds.
- Leaders and other staff pay close attention to the needs of pupils in Years 11 and 13. All Year 11 pupils have been offered, and the vast majority have received, one-to-one support to help them decide upon their next steps and to check on their well-being. Similarly, Year 13 students have been supported to make informed choices about their futures.
- The school's work to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has improved since the monitoring visit in January 2020. The newly appointed SENCo has brought more consistency and coherence to this aspect of the school's work. She works closely with external agencies to ensure that pupils with EHC plans receive the support they need.
- Senior and middle leaders have benefited from the external advice and monitoring provided by the school's two improvement partners.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, pupils, staff and governors to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also looked at curriculum plans, examples of pupils' work and evidence on how the school is providing remote education. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 26 free-text responses, and 62 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee
Her Majesty's Inspector