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Paul Willerton
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Dear Mr Willerton

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of The Sutton Academy

Following my remote inspection with Ahmed Marikar, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 18 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 May 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 subject curriculum plans across year groups clearly identify and sequence appropriately the knowledge that you want pupils and students to know and remember.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, the chair of trustees has resigned. The principal and an assistant principal have also left the school. A new chair of trustees has been appointed. You have taken up post as principal. Two new assistant principals have also joined the school.
- Approximately nine in every 10 pupils and students were educated at home in the spring term before the school reopened to all pupils. Just over half of all vulnerable pupils, and one in every five pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), were educated on site during that time.
- At the time of this inspection, almost all pupils were attending on site. A very small proportion of pupils were self-isolating and being educated remotely.

Main findings

- During the autumn term 2020, you and the school's leaders put in place effective systems to deliver the curriculum remotely. Leaders developed teachers' confidence in delivering curriculums to pupils and students at home. This meant that pupils and students continued to study their usual subjects when the school was only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions at the start of the spring term. The small group of pupils and students currently self-isolating also continue to follow their usual timetable. They have regular opportunities to discuss their work with their teachers. As a result, you and the staff have ensured that pupils and students can continue to learn effectively in the current circumstances.
- In recent months, leaders have made changes to the curriculum so that it remains as broad as possible for as long as possible. Senior leaders have worked together with subject leaders to ensure that curriculum plans reflect these changes. Subject leaders are now starting to improve these plans so that they outline clearly what pupils and students need to learn and when. Although this work is more advanced in some subjects such as physical education (PE) and mathematics, it is in the early stages for other subjects.
- Teachers have developed a range of effective approaches to check on what pupils and students have learned during the spring term 2021. Teachers use this information routinely to revisit the important knowledge that pupils have missed or forgotten. In some subjects, teachers have made appropriate changes to curriculum plans. For example, since pupils have returned to

school in March 2021, teachers in music, PE and design technology have prioritised practical activities.

- You have a range of strategies in place to develop pupils' and students' reading and vocabulary. Pupils and students read a range of books and articles regularly with their subject teachers. Teachers provide additional support for phonics, comprehension and grammar to those pupils who struggle with their reading. The pupils that we spoke to talked positively about this help.
- Pupils in Year 11 and students in Year 13 continue to study their examination subjects. Subject leaders have prioritised the most important learning that will benefit pupils in these year groups. Pupils in Year 11 and students in Year 13 also benefit from a range of support for their motivation, confidence and well-being. For example, they receive extensive guidance to prepare them for their next stage in education, employment or training. Students in Year 13 appreciate the support they receive with applications to college and university.
- You and other leaders work closely with the local authority and other external agencies to support vulnerable pupils. Staff contacted the parents and carers of this group of pupils regularly throughout the period when the school was only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions. This has made a positive difference to pupils' confidence in returning to school. Leaders provide effective support for those pupils who are young carers. These pupils appreciate help from staff on how to look after their well-being.
- You are ambitious for pupils with SEND. They are carefully supported by teachers and teaching assistants, whether they are in school or learning at home. Most pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as other pupils. A small number of pupils with SEND benefit from well-designed personalised curriculums. Teachers have made appropriate adaptations to subject curriculums to help pupils with SEND to catch up with missed learning and rebuild their confidence.
- The board of trustees provides you and other leaders with appropriate challenge and support. For example, trustees have ensured that the key stage 3 curriculum remains as broad as possible for as long as possible. Trustees have a good understanding of subject leaders' work to improve their curriculum plans. They assure themselves regularly that staff provide appropriate support for pupils with SEND.
- You have accessed a range of support from external partners. For example, an external consultant alongside leaders from a local teaching school has provided effective support to develop subject leaders' curriculum expertise. A local academy trust is working with trustees to further build their skills in holding you and the leadership team to account.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers, representatives from the board of trustees and a representative from the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also reviewed leaders' curriculum plans and examples of teaching materials. We spoke with pupils in key stages 3 and 4, and students in key stage 5, about their experiences of learning in school and remotely. We reviewed a selection of minutes from trustees' meetings. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 41 free-text responses, and 78 staff questionnaires.

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 St Helens. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Emmett
Her Majesty's Inspector