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Amanda Ryan
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Dear Mrs Ryan

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Hillside High School

Following my remote inspection with Michael Pennington, 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 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 February 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:

- develop teachers' proficiency in providing support for those pupils who find reading difficult
- develop teachers' expertise in using information about the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to better adapt the curriculum for this group of pupils.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, six teachers and four members of support staff have left the school. Five teachers and six members of support staff have joined the school. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) was appointed in January 2020. One member of the governing body has resigned.
- Approximately nine out of every 10 pupils were educated at home in the spring term before the school reopened to all pupils. During the same period, just over half of vulnerable pupils and roughly half of those pupils with education, health and care plans were attending school.
- At the time of this inspection, just over nine out of every 10 pupils were attending school. A very small proportion of pupils were self-isolating and being educated remotely.

Main findings

- You and the school's leaders have ensured that curriculums are planned well, and that staff are well versed in the systems to deliver education remotely. During the autumn term, leaders ensured that pupils had suitable electronic devices. This meant that following the period when schools were only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions earlier in the spring term, staff switched seamlessly to delivering a well-planned curriculum remotely. Those pupils who are currently self-isolating continue with their learning and receive appropriate support from their teachers. As a result, you, leaders and teachers have successfully ensured that pupils continue to learn despite the many challenges imposed by COVID-19.
- Prior to the pandemic, senior leaders had ensured that subject curriculums were appropriately ambitious. For example, subject leaders in science and history redesigned their curriculums to cover topics in greater depth. During the first national lockdown, leaders worked to identify the most important knowledge that pupils should know and remember. This helped leaders to modify curriculum plans in preparation for pupils' return to school in September 2020. For example, teachers in Spanish adapted learning in the autumn term so that pupils could revisit key vocabulary. Throughout the pandemic, senior leaders have ensured that teachers have continued to access appropriate training. This training has helped teachers to better

understand how pupils learn effectively. In turn, this has led to an improvement in their delivery of the curriculum.

- Following pupils' most recent return to school, you have allowed time for teachers to identify what pupils can remember from earlier learning. This is informing subject leaders' appropriate amendments to the curriculum. For example, in geography some pupils in Year 8 have forgotten important facts about weather and climate. For pupils to revisit this learning, leaders in geography have adapted a forthcoming topic on Antarctica. You have plans to check that subject leaders adopt an effective approach to ensuring pupils get back on track with their learning.
- You recognise the need to ensure that pupils in Year 11 regain any lost ground quickly. Through their work to adapt the curriculum, subject leaders have prioritised the knowledge that will be the most helpful for this group of pupils. Those pupils in Year 11 who have fallen behind in mathematics and English benefit from effective one-to-one support. Throughout the pandemic, pupils in Year 11 have continued to profit from impartial careers advice and guidance.
- You are determined that pupils read with fluency. To this end, leaders have brought about a range of appropriate strategies, including support to develop pupils' comprehension skills. In recent months, you have identified an unusually high proportion of younger pupils who struggle with reading. Some staff have the skills and knowledge necessary to support these pupils effectively. That said, there is more to do to develop the expertise of all teachers so that they can better support those pupils who struggle the most with reading.
- You continue to prioritise the well-being of vulnerable pupils. During the period when schools were only open to some pupils due to COVID-19 restrictions, vulnerable pupils have benefited from extra support and regular contact with staff. During the last twelve months, leaders have improved the quality of support for pupils with SEND. The SENCo has ensured that all teachers know and understand pupils' individual needs. Leaders have also provided guidance for staff to help them to better meet the needs of this group of pupils. However, teachers across the school are at different stages in using this guidance effectively to adapt the curriculum for pupils with SEND.
- In their regular discussions with you, members of the governing body have checked on how effectively staff provide education, including for those pupils learning at home. Despite the challenging circumstances, governors have not lost sight of your improvement priorities. For example, they have kept a close eye on subject leaders' work to develop curriculum planning and training for teachers to improve how well curriculums are delivered.

- The school continues to gain from effective support from within the Wade Deacon Trust. Support from within the trust has had a positive impact on senior and subject leaders' work to improve the school's curriculum. Some subject leaders have also been able to make the most of external support from specialist leaders in education. For instance, this support has had a positive impact on leaders' work to design, plan and deliver the geography curriculum effectively.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, a group of subject leaders, two groups of pupils, four representatives of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair of governors, and three representatives of the Wade Deacon Trust to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also reviewed samples of the school's curriculum plans and scrutinised minutes of governing body meetings. We looked at 27 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 22 free-text responses, and 37 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Wade Deacon multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sefton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory
Her Majesty's Inspector