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8 March 2021

Alison Emmerson
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Dear Mrs Emmerson

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Marden Vale Church of England Academy

Following my remote inspection with Dale Burr, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 3 and 4 February 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 require special measures.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, 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 June 2018.

Having considered all the evidence and taking into account the impact of COVID-19 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.

Context

- Since the last monitoring visit in January 2020, there have been significant staff changes. This includes a new deputy headteacher, a leader of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), leaders of English and mathematics, and two new teachers. A new chair of governors joined in September 2020. There is a new safeguarding governor.
- Across the autumn term 2020, approximately 25% of pupils had to be educated remotely.
- At the time of this inspection, about 70% of pupils were being educated at home. Approximately 33% of all pupils who are vulnerable and 60% of pupils with education, health and care plans were attending on site.
- The leader of the specialist resource base, for pupils with complex needs, leaves at the February 2021 half-term. The recruitment process to fill this position is under way. At the time of the inspection, no staff were absent due to COVID-19.

Main findings

- Since the last monitoring inspection, in January 2020, your drive to improve the school has continued at pace. Despite many new staff, leaders' clear communication is maintaining a strong direction of improvement.
- New leaders are using their strong subject knowledge to train teachers and improve their knowledge and expertise. In September 2020, leaders adjusted the curriculum to help pupils who had fallen behind to catch up. Extra teaching covered missed learning. Such actions helped to tackle many of the remaining gaps in pupils' knowledge. By December 2020, many pupils were catching up, with some pupils doing much better.
- Leaders' work to improve the teaching of reading in early years, including children's speaking and early language skills, is paying off. Phonics lessons happen every day at school and through remote education. Pupils' reading books are more closely matched to the sounds pupils know. As a result, this is helping many pupils to practise reading words and sentences with increasing confidence.
- You are ensuring that leaders, teachers and pastoral staff keep in regular contact with vulnerable pupils and their families. At the same time, staff continue to provide extra support to families to help them access online learning. Extra electronic devices have been secured for pupils who need them and more devices are currently on order. This is helping to reduce the number of pupils who are having to rely on paper-based workpacks.

- Leaders expect pupils to complete the work teachers set daily. Across each week, the work set is based on the school's usual curriculum. It covers a full range of subjects. Since January 2021, vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers who are learning in school follow the same curriculum as the pupils who are learning at home. Pupils who are struggling with reading and writing are receiving extra teaching to catch up in school. As remote education is becoming more established, staff are beginning to plan similar additional catch-up sessions for those pupils who are educated at home.
- Teachers check how well pupils in their class are participating in remote education. They check which pieces of work pupils are completing and provide feedback to pupils on their work. More pupils are completing work in reading, writing and mathematics than in other subjects. Teachers are adapting their subject plans to ensure that work is easily accessible.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is correctly identifying the extra support that pupils need. Staff training is beginning to strengthen their confidence and skill in supporting this group of pupils. The SENCo regularly checks how well pupils with SEND are accessing remote education. While resource-base staff plan work for pupils regardless of where they are educated, their work to provide digitally based learning is still in its infancy.
- A coaching programme for governors is improving their knowledge and skills. The expertise shared by new governors is bolstering governors' capacity to support and challenge leaders. Trust leaders monitor school leaders' work closely. Where face-to-face meetings are not possible, the trust carries these out remotely. Trust staff and governors have a clear understanding of the challenges that leaders are facing. They know that getting every pupil to access education in the current circumstance is a top priority.
- Trust staff are providing much support for leaders and teachers. Work to revamp the wider curriculum is well under way. Art, music, physical education, history and geography documents set out the subject content from early years to Year 6. More work with the trust to upgrade curriculum plans in computing, foreign languages, and design and technology is at a planning stage. Leaders are working with local English and mathematics hubs to assist in training and provide support for teachers.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the extended leadership team. We also held meetings with the multi-academy trust chief executive, director of education, regional director of education, trustees, a representative of the local governing body, staff, pupils and a representative of the local authority to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

Inspectors carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work through the school's online learning platform. This included the work of pupils who are learning at school and that of pupils who are learning remotely. We reviewed school documentation, governors' minutes and recent monitoring documents from the trust. An inspector listened to pupils read. We looked at 11 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 26 staff questionnaire responses.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive of the Diocese of Salisbury multi-academy trust (DSAT), the director of education for the Diocese of Salisbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector