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Louise Cook
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Dear Ms Cook

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Homewood College

Following my remote inspection with Aimee Floyd, 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 require improvement.

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 has received two successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in December 2019.

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.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- prioritise reading, including by gaining a comprehensive understanding of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in reading and developing a strategic approach, so that the subsequent curriculum meets pupils' needs effectively
- ensure that curriculum content is consistently well chosen and sequenced in all subjects, so that it is clear what knowledge, skills and understanding pupils will achieve by the time they leave the school.

Context

- All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The primary need for pupils in the school is social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). Across the autumn term 2020, a very small number of pupils had to self-isolate for a short period of time because of COVID-19. At the time of the inspection, approximately half of pupils were being educated on site and half at home.
- Since the previous inspection, one new parent governor has been appointed and staffing has been restructured. Some staff have left the school, including a head of school.
- To cover for the current absence of two senior leaders, the executive headteacher has been based at Homewood. In addition, governors have appointed two existing members of staff to temporary leadership positions and created an additional leadership role as a temporary seconded post. The current head of school was appointed before the last inspection as a temporary secondment. The school is now advertising for a substantive appointment to this post.

Main findings

- Leaders and governors have made sure that pupils at home and at school have access to lessons and resources that build on what they have already learned. Leaders have made some well-judged adjustments in some subjects. For example, pupils told us that cooking ingredients are delivered home so that pupils at home can cook the same things as pupils at school. Governors have provided strong support for leaders, rightly prioritising safeguarding as part of their checks on the effectiveness of leaders' actions.
- Leaders, staff and governors are acutely aware of the additional vulnerabilities that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have faced throughout the pandemic, and may continue to experience as all pupils return to school. Leaders have been tenacious in ensuring that all pupils are able to continue to receive their usual therapies and extra help, which supports their emotional well-being. In addition, the local authority has provided additional, long-term help from some educational psychologists so that support will be on-hand as pupils need it.

- In September 2020, leaders introduced a new curriculum which aims to make sure that pupils' individual SEMH needs are taken into account more effectively as they learn. Leaders and pupils told inspectors that 'coaching' sessions led by key workers have been a particularly positive part of their new provision. Similarly, a new approach to managing pupils' behaviour is proving to be successful, with fewer incidents of poor behaviour seen last term.
- In each subject, teachers are beginning to carefully construct a curriculum to build up pupils' knowledge over time. This work is better developed in some subjects than others. For example, in science and food technology it is particularly clear what knowledge pupils should have gained by the time they leave the school. Staff are now working to develop the curriculum further, in partnership with another school, as part of a useful arrangement brokered by the local authority.
- The school's approach to improving pupils' literacy is less well developed. Although there has been some early success in improving pupils' love of reading, leaders have not devised a sufficiently strategic approach to identifying and addressing pupils' particular strengths and weaknesses in reading. Similarly, intended approaches to improving vocabulary and spelling are not yet consistently well thought through.
- Leaders continue to prioritise ensuring that pupils are well prepared for their future lives as participating members of society. Throughout the pandemic, they have worked within national restrictions to ensure that pupils continue to experience extra-curricular activities which help to develop pupils' social and emotional skills.
- Pupils' attendance has improved since the last inspection. This is due to a more strategic approach from leaders, who are better at identifying and addressing the barriers to pupils' attendance. Leaders also believe that raising expectations of what pupils can achieve through the introduction of nationally recognised qualifications, such as GCSE food and nutrition, is encouraging pupils to attend more regularly, especially in Year 11.
- This term, leaders have continued to work to improve the very low attendance of some pupils who struggle to come to school regularly. Impressively, they have continued to provide therapy and education in the community within the restrictions of the current circumstances, for example through cycle rides and dog walks.
- The local authority has provided a range of additional help since the previous inspection. This includes funding additional provision that supports pupils' SEMH needs, assisting the school in managing staffing difficulties, and brokering school-to-school support from a national leader of education (NLE).

Evidence

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

We also looked at some curriculum plans and spoke to a small group of pupils. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including one free-text response, and 17 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Brighton and Hove. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector