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Sem Cao
Head of School
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Dear Ms Cao

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Firbeck Academy

Following my remote inspection with Stephanie Innes-Taylor, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 25 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 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 July 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:

- train staff so that the school's new approach to teaching phonics is delivered consistently.

Context

- A new executive headteacher and head of school have been appointed since the last inspection.
- A small proportion of pupils were educated remotely during the autumn term. The school's early years 'bubble' worked remotely on one occasion.
- At the time of this inspection, around a quarter of pupils were being educated on site. Just over half of the school's vulnerable pupils and approximately a third of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were being educated on site. Three quarters of pupils with education, health and care plans were also being educated on site.

Main findings

- The new leadership team has put in place a new and improved curriculum. This sets out what pupils need to know and remember as they progress through school. Leaders have carefully considered the order in which pupils learn new things and have selected the key vocabulary that pupils are expected to know and use. Plans are not yet finalised in a small number of subjects, including music and physical education.
- Leaders have improved how reading is taught. They have set out what they expect pupils to achieve in reading in each year group. Leaders have ensured that pupils have access to a wide range of engaging books to read. Teachers read daily to pupils to help foster a love of reading.
- A new programme for teaching phonics has been introduced. Teachers make regular checks to see how pupils are progressing. If pupils begin to fall behind, they get help to catch up. However, the new programme is at an early stage of implementation. Staff need further training to make sure that it is delivered consistently in all year groups.
- Pupils working remotely study the school's usual curriculum. Teachers set interesting work and regularly check how pupils are getting on. When pupils find work difficult, they get extra help from teachers and teaching assistants. There is effective communication between teachers and parents. If pupils are not completing work, teachers quickly follow this up and provide support.
- Pupils attending the school are set the same work as those who are working remotely. The adults in school assess how pupils are getting on and provide feedback to pupils and teachers.

- Leaders make sure that pupils with SEND access the school’s curriculum. Teachers adapt work and provide extra equipment to support SEND pupils in their learning. Leaders provide advice and guidance to parents so they can support their child’s learning at home. When pupils need additional support, leaders ensure that it is provided in school and remotely.
- The governing body is ambitious for the school. Governors hold leaders to account for the decisions that they have taken about the education that is provided. Governors know what is working well in the school and what needs to improve further. Governors value the recent improvements to the curriculum and remote learning offer.
- Trustees share the governing body’s ambition for the school. The trust has provided effective support around the curriculum, reading and remote education. The trust has also provided practical support, such as bulk purchasing of resources and creating risk assessments, to help the school to deal with the challenges of the pandemic.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the trust’s vice-chief executive officer and those responsible for governance to discuss leaders’ actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also met with a group of staff, listened to pupils read to adults in school and looked at examples of remote learning. We spoke to leaders responsible for the curriculum, reading and SEND. We looked at responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, including 10 free-text responses, and 23 staff questionnaires. We also looked at parental comments collated by leaders.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Nova Education Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children’s services for Nottingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Vic Wilkinson
Her Majesty’s Inspector