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Ben Davis
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Dear Mr Davis

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Ambrose Barlow RC High School

Following my remote inspection with David Selby, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 24 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in November 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:

- strengthen the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) so that this group of pupils' needs are fully met
- ensure that teachers develop their expertise in the teaching of reading, including phonics, to enable those pupils who are behind with their reading to catch up quickly
- ensure that all governors have the essential knowledge and expertise to hold leaders fully to account.

Context

- From 1 September 2019, the school's sixth form ceased admitting new students. From 1 September 2020, the school became an 11 to 16 provider.
- Since the last inspection, there have been considerable staff changes. New appointments include: an assistant headteacher; a lead practitioner in mathematics; and a subject leader of modern foreign languages.
- Some staff have been promoted from within the school to leadership roles. These staff include five associate assistant headteachers and a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo).
- Seven members of the governing body have resigned. Four new governors have been appointed.
- In the spring term 2021, just over nine tenths of pupils were educated at home. Approximately one half of pupils with an education, health and care plan, and around three quarters of vulnerable pupils, were educated on site.
- At the time of this inspection, most pupils were being educated on site. Several pupils, mainly in Year 8, were self-isolating.

Main findings

- Since the start of the pandemic, you and other leaders have galvanised staff to ensure that pupils continue to receive an education in the current circumstances. When the third national lockdown began, teachers quickly transferred to delivering subject curriculums remotely. Consequently, learning was uninterrupted for pupils, irrespective of whether they learned in school or at home. You ensure that those pupils currently self-isolating continue to access the same curriculum as their peers.
- Before the pandemic, your comprehensive review of the curriculum revealed that it did not provide the necessary depth and ambition for all pupils. Neither did it prepare pupils to be as successful as possible in their next stage of their

education. Accordingly, you and other leaders instigated the process of reorganising and strengthening the curriculum.

- You secured support from a national leader of education (NLE) and several specialist leaders of education (SLEs) to work alongside you, other senior leaders and subject leaders. They continue to provide welcome advice and expertise on a comprehensive range of curriculum matters. This support has significantly helped leaders to revise, reorder and develop new curriculum content. By March 2020, you were well on the way to launching the revised curriculum.
- With the onset of the pandemic, leaders' work on the curriculum changed direction. Teachers successfully amended the order in which pupils learned certain topics. They made essential adaptations to how subject content was taught, including practical elements of courses. Pupils have benefited from a continuity in learning whether at home or in school.
- Teachers have reintroduced the full curriculum now that most pupils have returned to school. Teachers make appropriate checks on the subject knowledge that pupils in Years 7 to 11 have remembered or forgotten since the start of the pandemic. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have also completed assessments in most subjects. As a result, teachers are appropriately adjusting the taught curriculum. They are also using a range of helpful approaches so that pupils catch up with their learning.
- Leaders have focused effectively on supporting Year 11 pupils to make up lost ground in their learning. Leaders have identified the essential curriculum knowledge that Year 11 pupils must continue to learn to be prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training. You have provided some pupils with additional tutoring in English and mathematics so that they can regain lost knowledge more quickly in these subjects.
- Leaders have developed a common approach to help pupils to improve their ability to read academic texts. Despite the impact of the pandemic, this approach is already paying dividends as pupils become more confident and willing to engage with reading. Nevertheless, leaders are not sufficiently aware of which pupils are behind in their basic reading knowledge. Nor have they identified specific weaknesses in these pupils' phonic knowledge. There is little support in place for these pupils. Therefore, they are unable to improve their reading skills at the pace required.
- In recent weeks, leaders' work to improve the education of pupils with SEND has gained momentum. You, and those responsible for governance, have taken the appropriate action to stabilise the leadership of SEND. You have appointed a SENCo who is well supported by a suitably experienced senior leader from another school. Together, they have taken steps to improve education for this group of pupils. However, it is far too early to judge the

impact of this work. Leaders recognise that there is a long way to go before the provision for pupils with SEND is fully in place. Nevertheless, staff ensure that the well-being of vulnerable pupils and pupils with SEND is carefully checked.

- Governors commissioned a review of how effectively they fulfil their roles. However, completion of this has been hampered by the pandemic. Consequently, their best intentions to improve their collective knowledge of governance have slowed significantly. As such, they do not hold leaders to account as well as they should.
- Leaders have benefited from the support and training provided by the local authority, especially around staffing and finance.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, members of the governing body, representatives of the Diocese of Salford and the local authority. We also spoke with subject leaders, members of the teaching staff, two teaching assistants, some groups of pupils, and an NLE and an SLE from a local teaching school. These meetings were to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also reviewed minutes of the governing body meetings, external reports and audits commissioned by the school, a selection of curriculum documentation and examples of the education provided to pupils when they were learning remotely. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 60 free-text responses, and 50 staff questionnaires.

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

Yours sincerely

Alyson Middlemass
Her Majesty's Inspector