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Mark Lawrence
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Dear Mr Lawrence

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Buckler's Mead Academy

Following my remote inspection with Sue Costello, 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 to 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 November 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.

Context

- Since the last inspection, you have appointed two acting deputy headteachers and three associate members of the senior leadership team. You have appointed the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) to the senior leadership team. You are in the process of joining a multi-academy trust.
- Across the autumn term 2020, you did not need to send any 'bubbles' home. Therefore, all but a very few pupils continued to access their education in school.
- At the time of this inspection, approximately eight out of ten pupils were being educated at home. A third of vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are attending on site.

Main findings

- You, and other leaders, have high expectations for all. Together, you have worked diligently to provide education to pupils in the current circumstances. Pupils are complimentary of their teachers and the education they receive. They feel remote learning is well planned and matched to the usual curriculum.
- Following the last inspection, you have been ambitious and acted decisively. You have added capacity to the overall leadership within the school. For example, you have restructured the senior leadership team and appointed several new subject leaders. You introduced quickly higher expectations of behaviour. The pandemic has been challenging in enabling you to cement the improvements. Disruption to the school's opening has made it difficult for pupils to fully adjust to your higher expectations of behaviour.
- You prioritised, astutely, broadening and strengthening the curriculum. In particular, the leadership of subjects and curriculum planning are a strength. The English leader has planned a coherent and well-sequenced curriculum. She has established high expectations in the delivery of English lessons. However, you know there is still a long way to go. In particular, you are looking to secure greater consistency in how teachers deliver your improved curriculum planning across subjects.
- You have made significant improvements to your remote offer for pupils. There is a blend of online learning and 'live' lessons in place. A very high number of pupils are engaging with it effectively. Teachers feel well supported by leaders. They recognise the impact that professional development has had on what they are offering. Provision for pupils in Year 11 has been well considered. Year 11 pupils continue to benefit from useful careers advice. You expect pupils to complete the full content of their subjects before they leave school.

- You, and other leaders, have taken effective action to provide support for vulnerable pupils. Those who most need to be in school have been offered a place. Robust systems to track the attendance and engagement of pupils have been established. As a result, staff can target extra support and contact where it is needed. Reading has been sensibly prioritised. You have a range of strategies to accelerate pupils' ability in reading, including daily whole class reading lessons. There are interventions for those who need to catch up.
- You have established plans to educate children with SEND in the current circumstances. The SENCo is well-trained and knowledgeable. She has followed risk assessment processes set by the local area appropriately. The SENCo monitors the engagement and quality of work produced by pupils with SEND regularly. Consequently, these pupils are being offered an appropriate provision to meet their needs.
- Governance at the school is improving. Directors have commissioned external support to develop and improve their effectiveness. They have diligently completed and acted on an external review of governance. There is evidence of greater challenge and scrutiny from directors in the minutes of meetings. For example, they provided appropriate challenge when you were formulating plans to provide education in the latest national lockdown.
- You have been outward looking as a leadership team. You have sensibly looked beyond the local area when appointing key leaders and when commissioning support for school improvement. This has allowed you to make strong use of external support to improve your curriculum.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with senior leaders including the acting headteacher, two directors, some subject leaders and the SENCo to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We met with pupils, a selection of staff, reviewed documentary evidence including minutes of the board of directors, analysed 32 responses to Parent View and sampled the remote learning offer for pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
Her Majesty's Inspector