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Claire Jaques
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jaques

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Richard De Clare Community Academy

Following my remote inspection with Fyfe Johnston, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 24 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 June 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:

- fully embed the new curriculum, ensuring that pupils' new learning builds upon what has come before
- increase the proportion of pupils who engage in remote learning and complete their work
- ensure that there is sufficient leadership capacity in place to maintain the school's improvement.

Context

- Since the section 5 inspection, you were appointed as executive headteacher and a head of school has been appointed. Leadership across the school has been restructured, with new subject and phase leaders in place.
- The school is part of the North Essex Multi-Academy Trust. The trust is shortly to merge with the Bridge Academy Trust. The governing body was dissolved following the section 5 inspection and there is currently an independent 'intervention board' in place.
- Two thirds of pupils had to work remotely at some point during the autumn term in 2020 due to COVID-19. Year 5 was affected more than other year groups, with two extended periods at home.
- At the time of this inspection, about a fifth of pupils are educated on site. Two thirds of vulnerable pupils are being educated on site as are one third of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Main findings

- Leaders have revised the school's curriculum. The new curriculum has begun to be implemented since September 2020. You are ensuring that pupils learning remotely are being taught this curriculum, making adaptations in some subjects, such as physical education.
- Leaders have arranged a full programme of staff training to enable all teachers to deliver the curriculum well. This training is ongoing. Opportunities for staff to collaborate with each other, to improve implementation of the curriculum, have been limited due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- Leaders have arranged for remote learning to take place via an online platform, the school's website and paper packs. Teachers have made regular use of pre-recorded teaching from sources, such as Oak National Academy, so that new learning is explained to pupils. Recently, teachers began delivering two 'live' lessons a day. These are very popular with parents and pupils.

- Vulnerable and other pupils being taught on site follow the same curriculum as that set remotely, including joining the 'live' lessons to be part of their classes. Pupils said they have appreciated the help their teachers have given them.
- Teachers have supported parents with detailed guidance on possible activities for their children to complete each day. Teachers offer families a weekly video call. These show parents how to help their children with home learning, such as to explain the phonics that pupils should practise. Pupils have access to appropriate reading books online or in hard copy format if parents request this.
- Pupils with SEND do not consistently receive the support they need to access the curriculum. You are continuing to develop this aspect of the school's work. Teachers set different 'challenge levels' in pupils' work. They have sent home ideas from SEND plans for parents to work on. However, pupils with SEND working remotely have not always had enough support to meet their individual learning needs.
- You are checking on pupils' welfare regularly and encouraging all to attend their remote lessons and complete their work. A minority of pupils are not doing so.
- At the time of this inspection, some of the school's leaders were temporarily seconded from other schools in the trust. Arrangements have not yet been made to provide sufficient permanent leadership capacity to continue the school's improvement once it joins the new trust.
- The intervention board has a clear idea of the key priorities for the school and how these have changed over time. Members of the board meet with leaders and other staff to check on what progress has been made.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other leaders, the trust's chief executive officer and a member of the intervention board to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown. We also spoke to teachers who shared examples of work that is set remotely and two groups of pupils.

We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 35 free-text responses, and 42 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the North Essex multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tessa Holledge
Her Majesty's Inspector