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Kevin Shepherd
Principal
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Dear Mr Shepherd

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy

Following my remote inspection with Timothy Jenner, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 23 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.

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 March 2019.

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:

- raise levels of engagement in remote education for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), especially in Years 8 and 10
- ensure that the curriculum in a wide range of subjects enables pupils to acquire the key knowledge that they need over their time in school.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, the school has undergone some significant changes. A new principal took up the role in September 2019, along with two new heads of year.
- In May 2020, the school joined Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust, which is an expanding multi-academy trust (MAT) operating in Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland. A new governing body was also formed. The chairperson remains the same.
- Over the autumn term 2020, approximately 60% pupils were educated remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of pupils who needed to be educated at home were from Year 10.
- Approximately 90% of pupils are currently being educated at home. About 30% of vulnerable pupils, including those with educational, health and care plans, are currently being educated on site.

Main findings

- Over recent months, you and your leaders have successfully overhauled the way in which pupils receive remote education. The curriculum is now wholly delivered online. You have ensured that all pupils have the technical support that they need to access online lessons when at home. Staff, parents and pupils are very positive about the new arrangements for delivering remote learning online.
- You and your leaders have trained staff well in using the new online system to deliver live lessons. Teaching staff are skilled at providing opportunities for pupils to engage in their lessons by posing questions to pupils and responding to pupils' answers. Staff also provide opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas with each other.
- Teachers have developed imaginative ways of presenting information and demonstrating to pupils how to go about completing tasks. They have shown Year 11 pupils and Year 13 students what they need to do in order to achieve a high standard in the qualifications they are taking. For example, Year 13 drama students use the online system to record their performances. They

then listen back to these recordings and explore how to develop their technique further.

- Subject leaders keep a close watch on the quality of remote lessons. They provide detailed feedback to teachers based on their observations. Subject leaders also ensure that teachers have the chance to share tips and advice about online approaches that work well for the topic that they are teaching.
- You have thorough systems in place for checking pupils' well-being and engagement. Pastoral staff attend online lessons so that they can assist the class teacher in their checks. Pastoral staff act quickly if they have concerns. They speak one-to-one with pupils and, if necessary, they make immediate telephone calls to alert parents and/or carers to their concerns.
- You carefully identify pupils who, despite receiving support, are persistently not engaging in online lessons when at home. You then expect them to attend intensive training which is held on the school site. The proportion of pupils with SEND engaging with learning online when at home has improved over the last few weeks. However, engagement levels for pupils with SEND remain too low, especially in Years 8 and 10.
- Leaders and staff have detailed knowledge of the individual circumstances of each vulnerable pupil. They are working tirelessly to increase the proportion of vulnerable pupils being educated on site and, as a result, the proportion is gradually rising. You diligently monitor each vulnerable pupil's engagement in their learning as well as their safety and well-being. You have regular contact with vulnerable pupils and make home visits when you have concerns.
- Pupils with SEND are provided with suitable additional help. Teaching assistants provide regular one-to-one support, which is face to face if the pupil is attending the school site, or online if they are at home. Pupils also participate in special programmes designed to help them catch up in reading, writing and numeracy. The reading programme helpfully includes phonics support for pupils who cannot read fluently.
- The governing body has been through a time of change. Nevertheless, governors have supported leaders consistently throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have championed leaders' decision to move away from paper-based remote education to online lessons. Governors have focused their checks on how well the online system for delivering lessons is working. Their oversight of the content of the remote education curriculum has not been as thorough.
- You have worked closely with another school in the same trust to improve both the content of the curriculum and the order in which topics are taught. Your work in this area is better developed in some subjects than in others. Some subject leaders and senior leaders are not clear enough about the small

components of subject knowledge that pupils need to know and remember in order to make progress.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We held meetings with you and other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead. We also met with the special educational needs coordinator, a group of subject leaders, teachers, two small groups of pupils, the chair of the governing body along with one other governor, the chief executive officer for the MAT and separately with the MAT's partnership director, to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown. We also reviewed recorded examples of live lessons and curriculum planning.

We also looked at 115 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 109 free-text responses, and reviewed 76 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector