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Patrick Butterell
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Dear Mr Butterell

Additional, monitoring inspection of Sutton Community Academy

Following my inspection with Jayne Ashman, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 4 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 have serious weaknesses.

Inspectors visited the school site due to significant concerns about safeguarding raised at the previous inspection. The range of evidence available to inspectors was narrower than would normally be the case. 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 have serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. 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.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to ensure that:

- the curriculum is broad and ambitious in all subjects and for all pupils, and focuses precisely on what subject knowledge pupils need to know and the order in which they should learn it, beginning with key stage 3
- the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is ambitious and inclusive so that these pupils can flourish
- early readers receive the support they need to be able to read well.

Context

- An interim principal and an interim vice principal oversaw the school throughout the autumn term 2020. An assistant principal and an interim assistant principal were appointed in July 2020 and November 2020, respectively. New leaders, including the principal, the vice principal and two assistant principals, joined the school in January 2021. A new chair of governors took over the role very recently, having not been a governor at the school previously.
- The leader responsible for safeguarding took up the role in September 2020. Curriculum leaders in physical education and modern foreign languages were also appointed then. The position of educational welfare officer was filled in November 2020.
- Only a small proportion of pupils were educated remotely across the autumn term 2020. Year 8 pupils were affected more than other year groups.
- At the time of this inspection, most pupils were being educated remotely at home. Nearly half of pupils with SEND and almost three quarters of vulnerable pupils were attending school on site.

Main findings

- The school's safeguarding culture has improved significantly since the previous monitoring inspection. The trust acted quickly to rectify previous weaknesses. The safeguarding team has an increased capacity of trained staff and is supported well by the trust's safeguarding leader. Leaders are knowledgeable about safeguarding practices and procedures.

- Staff identify and report safeguarding concerns with confidence. Safeguarding records are detailed and show that leaders act promptly to keep pupils safe. Leaders know how risks such as domestic violence have increased in the current circumstances. They regularly update detailed risk assessments for the most vulnerable pupils. Records of the recruitment checks for staff, volunteers and those responsible for governance are thorough. Arrangements for safeguarding are now secure.
- New senior leaders have quickly identified the critical issues that need addressing and are making plans to resolve them. Most parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, are positive about leaders' initial actions to bring about the changes necessary. Staff are optimistic. Typically, they told us that new senior leaders have provided a 'real impetus for improvement'.
- Leaders acted swiftly to ensure that pupils continue to be educated at this time. They adapted the school's approach to remote education in response to parents' feedback. Pupils access online lessons and resources using a suitable device. Leaders provide useful guidance so that pupils and their families are confident using this technology. A small number of pupils follow the same curriculum using paper-based resources.
- Teachers deliver the usual curriculum to pupils in most subjects. Curriculum leaders adapt plans that involve practical activities. In some subjects, teachers give pupils the resources they need to complete practical tasks at home. In Year 10 art, for example, leaders supplied pupils with charcoal for an assignment. Regular training has helped staff to make more effective use of technology to check pupils' learning remotely.
- Pupils on site follow the same curriculum as their peers at home. They benefit from extra help from staff and enjoy additional activities, such as physical exercise. Staff contact vulnerable pupils and pupils with SEND who are learning at home frequently. They check on their welfare and help them with their work. Pupils with poor attendance are invited to learn on site so that staff can give them extra support. Pupils' attendance and engagement with their learning have improved during the current national lockdown.
- The curriculum is not consistently planned well. Some curriculum leaders have not identified the knowledge they want pupils to know so that they can build on this. Pupils choose some of their options at the end of Year 8. This approach limits pupils' experiences of, for example, design and technology and the performing arts. In key stage 4, some pupils spend extra time learning mathematics and English, at the expense of other subjects. New leaders are in the initial stages of planning a curriculum that is aspirational and inclusive for all.

- Leaders have not ensured that they identify and support the needs of pupils with SEND closely enough. They have not considered how best to support these pupils when planning the curriculum. Too many of these pupils experience a curriculum that is narrower and less ambitious than their peers'. Leaders plan to appoint a new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) imminently, with the experience needed to improve the provision for these pupils.
- Staff encourage pupils' love of reading, for instance with the '16-for-16 reading challenge'. Some pupils read more often than they used to and more widely as a result. However, leaders do not provide effective support to those pupils in the earliest stages of being able to read. These pupils are not able to access the curriculum as well as they should.
- Leaders plan to carry out formal assessments with pupils in Years 11 and 13 when they return to school on site. Staff will work with others from the trust to check that their assessments are accurate.
- The trust has provided the school with significant help during the pandemic. For example, they have purchased new devices so that pupils can learn remotely and financed meals for disadvantaged pupils. Staff share ideas with colleagues in other trust schools to improve their practice. Trust officers and the new chair of governors have the knowledge and skills needed to support and challenge leaders.

Evidence

We spoke to you and members of the senior leadership team, including the leader responsible for safeguarding and the SENCo. We met with a group of pupils, a group of staff and curriculum leaders for English, science, art and design, and technology. We held meetings with the chair of the local governing body and a trustee, and trust officers of the Academy Transformation Trust, including the executive principal, the chief executive officer and a regional education director, to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also considered information about the curriculum and other documentation provided by school leaders. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 12 free-text responses, and 40 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Academy Transformation Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Nottinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff
Her Majesty's Inspector