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15 April 2021

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Dear Mrs Cook

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of St Richard's VC Academy

Following my remote inspection with Fiona Manuel, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 16 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 February 2020.

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:

- specify clearly what children need to know and remember in subjects other than English and mathematics for every year group
- make sure that the curriculum knowledge you want pupils to remember is checked closely by leaders in all subjects
- ensure that leaders' curriculum expectations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are clear.

Context

- There have been some significant changes in senior leadership. The head of school and assistant head of school left at the end of the summer term 2020. The current acting head of school took up post in September 2020. The senior leadership team has been restructured to include an assistant head of school.
- Approximately three quarters of pupils were educated at home when the school was only open to some pupils due to COVID-19 restrictions at the start of the spring term 2021. All vulnerable pupils and pupils with education, health and care plans were educated on site.
- At the time of this inspection, most pupils were learning on site. A small minority of pupils were self-isolating due to COVID-19.
- A very small proportion of staff were absent from school due to COVID-19 at the time of this inspection.

Main findings

- Leaders are passionate about inspiring their pupils to be curious learners. They have developed a vision for their educational offer for all pupils. This focuses on a set of values, such as 'pride', 'respect' and 'resilience'. Leaders carefully plan and sequence the curriculum in mathematics and phonics. They have checked what pupils know and remember in these subjects. Teachers plan lessons that include content that pupils have previously missed or forgotten.
- Leaders' plans for subjects beyond mathematics and phonics are less well developed. For example, leaders have not set out exactly what pupils should know and when in subjects such as history. It is not clear how pupils will build on the knowledge they have gained over their time in school. As these expectations are not clear enough, it is difficult for teachers and leaders to check what pupils know and can do.
- Leaders have made some adaptations to their curriculum through the pandemic. These are to suit the needs of pupils. For example, leaders have

prioritised support around reading and mathematics. Leaders continue to deliver the curriculum remotely for those pupils who have to learn from home. Pupils' welfare, safety and well-being continue to be priorities for leaders.

- Throughout the pandemic, leaders have supported families and pupils by communicating clearly with them. You have found out about pupils' needs and any barriers to learning so that you can support them. For example, you made paper packs of work available for families who told you that they prefer this way of working. One parent commented: 'The provision during lockdown was very good, varied, interesting and tailored to my child's needs.'
- Leaders promote a love of reading across the school in a range of ways. For example, pupils take part in daily 'drop everything and read' sessions. The focus on reading continued throughout the period when schools were only open to some pupils due to COVID-19 restrictions. There is a structured programme to support the daily teaching of phonics. Leaders have checked pupils' phonic knowledge since the full return to school in March 2021. This has allowed staff to build on what pupils know. Pupils who have gaps in their phonic knowledge receive extra daily support.
- Leaders ensured that vulnerable pupils attended school throughout the pandemic. You are passionate about protecting vulnerable pupils and keeping them free from harm. You understand the potential barriers families face in the community and offer support.
- Pupils with SEND receive support at the right time from external agencies. However, leaders' understanding of what pupils with SEND have learned and remembered in subjects beyond English and mathematics is limited. Leaders focus on the types of activity pupils do, rather than the knowledge they expect pupils to gain.
- The trust continues to support and challenge leaders. Improving leadership capacity continues to be a priority. The school improvement partner within the trust supports the acting head of school. Trust curriculum teams are in place to support school subject leaders. This has helped subject leaders to improve curriculum plans in subjects such as mathematics.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, multi-academy trust leaders, the chief executive officer, pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also carried out reviews of some curriculum plans. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 12 free-text responses, and 26 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Middlesbrough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kingston Upon Hull City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Thomas
Her Majesty's Inspector