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Christine McLintock
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Dear Mrs McLintock

Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Sir William Ramsay School

Following my remote inspection with Shaun Jarvis, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 18 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 December 2018.

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:

- embed a calm and purposeful culture where all pupils are able to learn effectively
- refine the curriculum and ensure that all staff know what knowledge pupils need to learn and remember to make progress in each subject, especially reading
- ensure that governors know and understand the school improvement priorities, why actions are taken and the impact they are intended to have so that they can hold leaders to account effectively.

Context

- The school has two additionally resourced provisions for pupils with education, health and care plans (EHC plans) for either hearing impairment or physical disability.
- There have been several changes to the senior leadership team and the governing body since the last inspection. These include new deputy and assistant headteachers and a new chair of the governing body.
- The vast majority of pupils were educated at home when the school was only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions earlier in the spring term. Approximately half of vulnerable pupils and a quarter of pupils with EHC plans attended on site during this time.
- At the time of this inspection, almost all pupils were attending on site.
- Some staff, including senior and middle leaders, were shielding when we inspected. Leaders have reorganised leadership responsibilities and adapted the school timetable so that staff working from home can teach remotely, with a colleague facilitating learning in the classroom.

Main findings

- Leaders have carefully managed the return of all pupils to the school site. They have focused on what they call 'back to basics' to support pupils to adjust to the school routines and rules after the recent period of remote education. Leaders anticipated that some pupils might struggle with the expectations for learning and have identified well-considered actions to support pupils and staff. They know that there is more to do to ensure a calm and purposeful working atmosphere throughout the school.
- Leaders have focused on settling pupils into routines rather than making up missed learning. They have asked teachers to use a variety of 'low stakes' techniques to find out what pupils remember and what learning they need to

make up. We inspected shortly after the school reopened to all pupils when information was still being collected, so staff did not yet know what knowledge needed to be prioritised. Leaders plan more formal testing after Easter to identify this information.

- Leaders have not thought carefully enough about what knowledge pupils need to know and remember, and in what order. Staff created new curriculum plans during spring and summer terms 2020 and started to use them in September 2020. These plans incorporate the school values and whole-school teaching and learning strategies successfully. However, many do not consider what knowledge pupils will learn. Those for GCSE and sixth-form subjects just note how examination specifications will be covered over the duration of the course. Some subject leaders understand how learning needs to be structured and build over time, but overall, there is a lack of clarity and consistency.
- Work to support pupils who need help to improve their reading has stalled. Leaders use many resources and commercial programmes, but the overall approach is confusing and has not had the impact required. Leaders recognise the need to improve this work urgently.
- Vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. Staff communicate effectively with pupils and their families, and with school and external colleagues, to help support pupils' learning. They made creative and effective use of assistive technologies to aid remote learning. They have sensible plans to continue using these resources now pupils have returned to school.
- Sixth-form students feel that their studies have not been disrupted at all. Online learning worked well for them. Leaders have also successfully supported pupils in Years 11 and 13 to plan their next steps. Careers education, information, advice and guidance continued well for these pupils because staff arranged activities such as mock interviews and work experience via digital channels.
- Governors are committed to the school and want to support improvement. They were decisive and allocated funds to provide digital devices and internet access during the pandemic, and so ensured that all pupils could access education. However, they do not have clarity about the school improvement priorities. They have not considered the quality of the curriculum, so are not able to hold leaders to account for this work.
- Various external partners have provided advice and support for leaders and governors. However, the priorities taken from this work are not focused or clear. There have been many initiatives, plans and changes. Consequently, it is difficult to assess the impact of this work.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance, including the chair of the trustees, and external improvement advisers to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We looked at 171 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 108 free-text comments, and 85 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees of the Sir William Ramsay School Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector