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10 March 2021

Joanna Young  
Principal  
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Dear Mrs Young

### **Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Leighton Academy**

Following my remote inspection with Janette Walker, 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.

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 has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in March 2020.

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:

- resume their checks on how well the new curriculum plans that they have put into place are helping pupils to remember new knowledge, including in reading.

### **Context**

- During the autumn term 2020, about one quarter of pupils had to learn from home for a short period of time due to self-isolation. A small number of pupils had to self-isolate on more than one occasion.
- At the time of the inspection, about one fifth of pupils were in school. This included approximately two thirds of vulnerable pupils.
- More than one third of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were attending the school at the time of the inspection. This included almost all pupils with an education, health and care plan.

### **Main findings**

- You and other leaders have taken effective action to ensure that pupils continue to learn whether they are at home or in school during the third period of national lockdown. Pupils access their usual range of subjects whether they are learning at home or in school. Teachers and leaders are diligent in checking that pupils take part in learning each day. Where pupils do not engage, staff quickly find out the reasons why. You make sure that pupils and their families receive all the support that they need. For example, pupils are offered a place in school if they are finding it difficult to learn at home.
- The local advisory board, who are responsible for governance, ensure that the current curriculum is broad and balanced. This is despite the fact that leaders have made some changes to the usual curriculum to enable pupils to learn remotely. The local advisory board also make sure that children of key workers are able to attend school whenever their parents need to work. You and the local advisory board ensure that the most vulnerable pupils have a place at school.
- In the last year, you and other leaders have successfully taken the steps required to prioritise reading right across the school. Reading, including phonics, now has a higher status in the curriculum. You have also taken effective action to revise the curriculum plans for reading. Leaders have trained teachers well to ensure that pupils read with increasing accuracy and fluency. You and other leaders have successfully ensured that the teaching of reading, including phonics, is a central part of each school day. The pupils with whom we spoke told us that they enjoy their class story time at the end of each day, whether they are onsite or learning from home.

- In addition to reading, you and other leaders have revised the curriculum plans in all other subjects. These new plans provide clear guidance for teachers on how to build pupils' knowledge of each subject over time and in the correct order.
- Leaders have the systems in place to check how well their curriculum plans are helping pupils to know and remember more. However, these checks on the quality of pupils' learning across the curriculum were paused in January 2021, due to the pandemic. This includes leaders' checks on the quality of the teaching of reading.
- Despite this, you and other leaders have made some appropriate adaptations to curriculum plans to address any learning that pupils might have missed or forgotten prior to this lockdown period. You and other teachers are revisiting the core knowledge across subjects to help pupils to catch up with any lost learning. Teachers and teaching assistants provide appropriate feedback to pupils to help them to improve, including if pupils are learning remotely.
- You and other leaders provide a wide range of effective support to pupils and their families when this is needed. For example, additional devices are provided to families who need them to access online learning. You and other leaders have maintained secure links with external agencies. For example, leaders and teachers help families to access local support or counselling services.
- You and other leaders ensure that pupils with SEND are supported well in their learning. Parents and carers told us that they value the support from their children's teachers, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and other leaders. The parents with whom we spoke described the adaptations that teachers have made to their children's curriculum. This support is effective in ensuring that pupils with SEND engage as well as they can in their learning.
- The leadership team has benefited from external support to revise the school's curriculum. Leaders have made effective use of consultants and reflected on evidence from research when implementing new resources or approaches.

## **Evidence**

This inspection was conducted remotely. During the inspection, we spoke with you and other senior leaders, including the SENCo; the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust; pupils; staff; and representatives of the local advisory board, including the chair of this board. During these meetings we discussed leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown. We also spoke with a small sample of parents on the telephone.

We considered the documentation provided by the school. We looked at curriculum plans. We reviewed minutes from meetings of the local advisory board. We also looked at samples of pupils' work. We observed pupils reading through video recordings. We looked at the 53 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 34 free-text responses. We also reviewed the 37 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local advisory board and the chief executive officer of The Learning for Life Partnership multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Cropper  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**