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Dear Dr Cusick

Additional monitoring inspection of Notley High School and Braintree Sixth Form

Following my inspection with Marc White, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on Thursday 25 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 have serious weaknesses.

The inspection took place because the school was judged to have serious weaknesses at its previous section 5 inspection. The school was last inspected in February 2020.

This monitoring inspection was an on-site visit due to significant concerns about safeguarding identified in the school's previous section 5 inspection.

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.

Safeguarding is not effective.

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

- ensure that systems for recording and monitoring a range of safeguarding information about pupils are understood and used effectively by staff, so that pupils get timely and effective help, when they need it
- continue to train staff to teach the curriculum so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access it fully and effectively
- develop leadership at all levels, so that staff are confident and proactive in their roles and work effectively with others to bring about the required urgent school improvement, especially but not exclusively, in behaviour and safeguarding.

Context

- Since the previous inspection, the deputy chief executive officer (CEO) has taken on the CEO role for North Essex Multi-Academy Trust (NEMAT). He has also taken on the executive headteacher role at this school and another school in the trust.
- The deputy headteacher is now the acting head of school. The head of English is now also an assistant headteacher. A deputy headteacher has been seconded from another school in the trust. There are also new leaders of science, mathematics, and technology.
- The CEO has appointed a Governors Intervention Board (GIB) to oversee the school's work alongside the existing local governing body.
- NEMAT is due to merge with The Bridge Academy Trust on 1 April 2021. The CEO of NEMAT will become the deputy CEO and director of secondary provision.
- At different points across the autumn term, all pupils had to be educated remotely. Years 8 and 10 were affected the most by repeated periods of isolation. The school closed to all pupils for four days in November 2020. All pupils were educated remotely during this time.
- Around 95% of pupils were being educated remotely at the time of this inspection. Approximately 4% of pupils with an education, health and care plan and around 5% of vulnerable pupils were being educated on site.

Main findings

- Leaders are using a range of systems to monitor behaviour, bullying, safeguarding and attendance but this information is not always shared. Safeguarding and attendance information is recorded poorly. As a result, leaders are not vigilant and timely in their response to emerging issues, nor

working with external agencies to get all pupils the appropriate help as soon as they need it. Despite leaders' positive work to safeguard some pupils, this systemic weakness means that safeguarding procedures to identify and protect all pupils are not effective.

- Leaders and the trust undertake checks on safeguarding procedures at the school. These checks have not identified the weaknesses in the school's safeguarding systems.
- You have ensured that there is a curriculum in place that is suitable for pupils who are learning remotely and in school. Consequently, pupils are provided with an appropriate education in the current circumstances.
- The range of lessons available to pupils, both on site and remotely, are exactly as they would be in a usual timetabled school day. Most lessons are 'live' lessons taught online. In physical education, pupils are set challenges to be completed offline. This arrangement is ensuring that pupils access a broad and relevant curriculum throughout the national lockdown.
- Leaders have thought carefully about how to adapt aspects of the curriculum during this period. Lesson times have been slightly reduced to allow lesson changeover on site, and to give pupils routine screen-breaks. Staff have amended their lesson planning accordingly. The order in which content is being taught has been amended in some practical subjects. Leaders have reviewed the curriculum to focus on areas such as mental health and emotional well-being, including through themed curriculum days.
- Pupils in Year 11 and students in Year 13 have continued with their normal timetabled lessons, including assessments and examinations. Leaders are planning on using this assessment information, in line with government guidance, to support decisions about achievement at the end of the academic year.
- Staff's understanding about how to deliver the curriculum for pupils with SEND is underdeveloped. Staff are not routinely identifying where pupils are struggling to access the curriculum and are not putting in place effective support for these pupils. Where parents have concerns, they are often related to how staff are meeting the needs of pupils with SEND.
- Your leaders are encouraging vulnerable pupils to attend on-site lessons, especially pupils who are not accessing all of the remote online lessons available to them. Registers show that most pupils are attending lessons regularly and engaging with their learning, including in the sixth form.
- Leaders have been developing their curriculum since the previous inspection and throughout the pandemic. While this has facilitated an effective remote curriculum to be put in place, COVID-19 closures and disruptions have hampered leaders' ability to implement and monitor the new curriculum.

Leaders are preparing to re-launch much of their vision for the school's curriculum, once all pupils return to site from 8 March 2021.

- You have developed new behaviour systems since the previous inspection of the school. Pupils and staff who spoke to inspectors during the inspection were positive about these changes. However, leaders' ability to embed this culture fully with all pupils has been hampered by COVID-19; most notably among a core of pupils with more significant behavioural needs. This group still account for a very high proportion of fixed term exclusions and internal misdemeanours.
- The new GIB has challenged leaders to focus on specific concerns raised at the time of the previous inspection, such as remote education, the curriculum, behaviour, and bullying.
- New leaders and a core of staff members are positive about the changes since the previous inspection. However, there are many staff who are not outrightly positive about the changes; some who do not feel supported by new leaders and a small number who do not feel that pupils are kept safe. Leaders were not aware that any staff had these concerns about pupils' safety.
- External support from other schools, specialist and national leaders in education, and the local authority has helped the school to start to address weaknesses identified during the previous inspection; in curriculum, assessment, behaviour and anti-bullying. In these areas, the school now has a clearer and more accurate sense of where they are improving, and what needs to happen next.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted on site due to concerns about safeguarding identified at the previous section 5 inspection. Inspectors held meetings with the CEO/executive headteacher, head of school, other senior leaders and safeguarding leads, members of the GIB, pupils, members of staff and a representative of the local authority. These meetings were held to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown and to review the school's safeguarding procedures.

Inspectors also reviewed some examples of remote learning, recorded lessons and lessons on site. Inspectors reviewed the single central record, behaviour and bullying information, and the school's safeguarding information. Inspectors also considered responses from Ofsted's online survey from 144 parents, and 103 members of staff.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of NEMAT, the regional schools commissioner

and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram
Her Majesty's Inspector