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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Clare Neuberger
Acting Headteacher
Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls School
Egerton Road
London
N16 6UB

Dear Mrs Neuberger

Additional monitoring inspection of Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls School

Following my inspection with Lucy Bruce, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 7 April 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 special measures.

Most of Ofsted's additional monitoring inspections are being carried out remotely. This inspection, however, took place on site due to significant concerns about governance.

The inspection took place because the school was judged to require special measures at its previous section 5 inspection. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in March 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:

- continue to develop the curriculum to ensure consistency in the way subjects are planned and delivered
- maintain the focus on developing the work of governors to ensure that the governing body has full oversight of the school's work.

Context

- There have been some changes to the governing body since the last inspection, including a new chair of governors. A new principal has also been appointed.
- A high proportion of pupils attended school on site during the start of the spring term. This is because leaders identified that these pupils may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home. Most pupils with an education, health and care plan also attended on site.
- At the time of this inspection, all pupils were being educated at school.

Main findings

- You and your staff have worked hard to ensure that all pupils receive a broad education. You found innovative ways to help pupils access learning when the school was partially closed. When we spoke with pupils, they talked excitedly about the work they did at home, including science experiments, and were able to recall their learning. For example, they remembered the work on colouring eggs and could use their knowledge to explain why the egg's shell dissolved. Currently, there are no pupils working from home.
- You and your colleagues have worked effectively to improve the curriculum. This work started before the pandemic and has continued. The inclusion of biology, personal, social, health and economic education, careers advice and citizenship has broadened the curriculum considerably. This is helping to raise pupils' aspirations and prepare them for the future.
- Work has continued to help ensure that the curriculum for each subject is planned logically, so that lessons build on pupils' previous learning. In mathematics, for example, learning is organised so that pupils move to more advanced work only when they have understood the essential knowledge that they need for the next stage. In subjects such as English and science, teachers have identified where certain concepts need to be revisited regularly to reinforce essential learning. Teachers of mathematics and science have worked together to identify links between the two subjects, for example how understanding percentages is common to both.

- Understandably, school closures due to COVID-19 have slowed the pace of the work to develop the curriculum. For example, ensuring that teaching helps pupils to deepen their knowledge and recall it later is not consistent across the school. Nevertheless, there are improvements and, despite difficulties, leaders have remained focused on maintaining high expectations and a broad education for all pupils.
- Pupils are taught in year group 'bubbles' so that movement around the school is kept to a minimum. Teachers identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and adapt their plans early on. They have used informal checks on learning as well as more structured tests. In addition, subject teachers have identified which parts of the curriculum they were unable to teach remotely. As a result, teaching plans have been adapted to help ensure that pupils cover the knowledge needed for future learning. For example, in mathematics, additional work has been done on proportion before moving on to more complex areas of algebra.
- Pupils in Year 11 are being helped to catch up with the essential learning they need for the future. Pupils confirmed that their teachers are helping them to revise for their formal assessments. They were especially complimentary about the way that their teachers support their learning, for example by providing one-to-one teaching to help them fill any gaps in their knowledge.
- Support for vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is carefully organised. You and your staff know pupils and their families well and use this knowledge to provide well-directed and appropriate support where needed. This includes support for pupils' well-being. For example, learning support assistants were allocated to pupils working from home and provided daily support. In addition, small-group sessions for pupils with SEND are provided when needed.
- Reading and literacy continue to be a focus. All Year 7 pupils are given reading tests at the start of the year to identify needs. Where necessary, a member of staff trained in phonics supports pupils with their reading. Time is allocated for pupils in each year group to use the library during lunch and break times to encourage reading.
- A serious breach of the COVID-19 restrictions occurred when the school building was hired for an external social event outside of school hours. Following this, governors have worked to improve their oversight of the school. Internal and external reviews of governance, focusing on the governing body's role, have been carried out. Many of the recommendations have already been adopted and an audit of governors' skills is being carried out. More robust systems and procedures are now in place to ensure governors have direct responsibility for letting out the premises. Governors recognise that there is more work to do to ensure strong oversight.

- Ongoing support from the local authority has helped the school improve its curriculum and the role of the governing body. For example, local authority officers worked closely with the school to review governance and have provided regular reviews of the curriculum. Leaders have also used external consultants to train staff.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted on site due to concerns about governance. We spoke to you, senior and middle leaders, pupils, staff and governors to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown. We also spoke to a representative of the local authority to follow up the issues raised by the breach of the COVID-19 restrictions.

We visited a sample of lessons and checked documentation. There were no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, or to staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for the London Borough of Hackney. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim
Her Majesty's Inspector