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Mrs Caroline Green
Executive Principal
Marchbank Free School
Mowden Hall
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Darlington
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Dear Mrs Green

Ofsted visit to Marchbank Free School

Following my visit with Steve Wren, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 29 September 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the visit's findings. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss your actions since September 2020, when the government expected all schools to open fully to all pupils.

This visit was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for visiting schools while routine inspections are temporarily suspended.

Ofsted's visits to schools during the autumn term are not inspections. We are not giving graded judgements. We did not undertake the usual range of inspection activities and were unable to check other sources of evidence, such as visits to lessons or looking at pupils' work. The content of this letter gives an overview of our discussions about what has happened in your school this term.

During the visit, we spoke to you, the head of school and other senior leaders. We did not speak to pupils because of the protective measures in place.

Context

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's education system is managing the return to full education for pupils, following an extended break in formal schooling due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

In undertaking this focused work, HMI are visiting a broad range of schools. HMI will visit a sample of:

- approximately 1,200 schools across all Ofsted grades (outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate)
- maintained schools, academies and free schools, special schools and centres of alternative provision, including those in cities, and coastal, town or rural communities.

The information from this visit will feed into Ofsted's national reporting so that the insights can be shared with the government and the education sector. We did not find any significant concerns during the visit. In such a case, an inspection report would be published on our website and available to parents and carers.

We did not consider your response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020, when the school was not open to all pupils.

From this visit, inspectors noted that:

- Marchbank Free School opened to all pupils on 3 September 2020.
- Pupils' attendance is above their normal attendance for this time of year.
- In line with your risk assessment, pupils are not playing contact sports in physical education (PE) lessons at the moment. Pupils are taking part in the other elements of the PE curriculum such as dance and gymnastics. You have plans for contact sports to be delivered later in the academic year.
- When pupils returned to school in September, your assessments identified gaps in their phonics knowledge. You told us that teachers and teaching assistants are delivering an extra phonics lesson every day to help pupils to catch up. You also said that pupils are reading with an adult on a one-to-one basis every day too.
- Since the beginning of term, teachers have assessed pupils' mathematical knowledge. Currently, teachers are using these assessments of pupils' knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division to plan pupils' next steps in the mathematics curriculum.
- You and your teachers, using the school's virtual learning environment and other applications, have plans in place to deliver all subjects virtually should the need arise in the coming months.

Thank you again for contributing to this important national work. The views and experiences you have shared will help to inform future policy.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director

of children's services for Darlington local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector