

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ann Dixon
Headteacher
Firthmoor Primary School
Ingleby Moor Crescent
Darlington
County Durham
DL1 4RW

Dear Mrs Dixon

Ofsted visit to Firthmoor Primary School

Following my visit with Carl Sugden, Seconded Inspector, to your school on 8 October 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, your acting deputy headteacher and a curriculum leader. 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:

- The school opened to all pupils on 3 September 2020. All pupils are expected to attend full time.
- Attendance is similar to that of the same period last year.
- All pupils are following the school's usual curriculum. Teachers are continuing to implement the curriculum that they have developed over the past year.
- Staff are focusing on children's reading and their personal development in early years to help them catch up with what they have missed.
- Teachers are checking pupils' phonics knowledge. You explained that teachers have identified areas where pupils' reading abilities are less secure than they were previously. Teachers are providing extra support for pupils who have fallen behind.
- Teachers are providing additional opportunities for pupils to write. Teachers have found that some pupils did not write regularly during the period when schools were only open to some pupils due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- In mathematics, leaders are focusing on pupils' knowledge of place value and fractions because they have noticed gaps in these areas.
- Teachers are teaching the usual wider curriculum. They have altered the order of topics in some subjects where they feel this is needed. Specialist staff are visiting the school to teach music and physical education. Leaders explained how teachers are adapting the use of space, equipment and group sizes so that practical subjects can be taught safely.
- Teachers are developing ways to deliver the curriculum remotely. Leaders are providing training in online systems that allow pupils to access their school work

when studying from home. Pupils are learning to use these systems to share their work with their teachers. You explained that teachers also provide pupils with packs of work and reading books when they study at home.

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 governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector