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6 November 2020

Steve Derham  
Headteacher  
Sycamore Short Stay School  
Old Farm Estate  
Dudley  
DY1 3QE

Dear Mr Derham

### **Ofsted visit to Sycamore Short Stay School**

Following my visit with Chris Pollitt, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 13 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 the senior leadership team and deputy leader responsible for safeguarding. 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 for the start of the autumn term on 3 September 2020. Pupils were admitted over a two-day phased period. The school opened for all pupils on 7 September. You told us that some pupils will remain on part-time timetables until other alternative provision is in place to support their full-time return to school.
- There are individual plans in place to support each pupil's return to school. You work with families and specialist external agencies to support and maintain pupils' attendance. Attendance comparisons with previous years are difficult to make as the school is a short stay provision.
- Most pupils who join the school have had prolonged periods out of education. A number of pupils have joined the school during the lockdown period. You have used a range of assessments to identify gaps in pupils' learning, including in reading, English, mathematics and science. This information is used to develop individual learning plans. Pupils' social and emotional needs are also assessed to identify any additional pastoral support they may need.
- Assessments of pupils' phonic and reading skills have been completed in all year groups. Teaching is based on these assessments. All pupils read every day in school and have weekly group reading sessions. Where needed, additional one-to-one reading support is provided.
- In mathematics, you assess where pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The mathematics curriculum is focused on the gaps identified.
- Timetables and classroom organisation have been adapted so that pupils can study the usual range of subjects. This includes practical subjects such as music, food technology and physical education. However, pupils are not able

to go swimming because the facilities they use are not open. In addition, pupils are currently not able to access the outdoor education provision.

- You have developed a range of remote learning resources for pupils, including online learning and paper-based work packs. Due to the different needs of each pupil, you have provided each pupil with an individualised package of remote learning. You provide parents with guidance and information about the home learning resources. You are intending to continue this remote learning as and when required.

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 Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**