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10 November 2020

Rebecca Hann
Head of School
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Dear Ms Hann

Ofsted visit to Thomas Walling Primary Academy

Following my visit with Gill Wild, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 15 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. 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 in Reception to Year 6 on a full-time basis on 9 September 2020. Your part-time nursery provision opened on 14 September 2020.
- Pupils' attendance is lower than usual for the school at this time of year. Leaders told us that they have increased their contact with families to encourage pupils to attend regularly.
- All pupils are studying the full range of subjects that are typically part of the school's curriculum. Teachers have altered the sequencing of some content so that some aspects of the curriculum, such as cookery and swimming, will be taught later in the year. You expect to return to the school's usual curriculum by summer term 2021.
- Leaders directed staff to carry out checks on pupils' reading. Teachers are providing additional sessions to reinforce phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) with those who need more practice. You have also recognised that some pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 need additional support with comprehension.
- During the first few weeks of this year, teachers have focused on revisiting mathematics topics from the previous year. You told us that teachers are checking that this subject knowledge has been learned and understood by pupils before moving onto new content. Daily intervention is available for pupils who are identified by teachers as needing additional support.
- Teachers have identified subject content from the wider curriculum, such as science and history, that pupils may have missed. Leaders told us that teachers are adjusting curriculum plans to cover the prior knowledge that pupils need before teaching new content.

- You have plans in place which enable you to deliver the curriculum remotely, should it be required. You told us that you have invested in additional resources to build on your existing remote-learning package.

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 chief executive officer of the Laidlaw Schools Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Graham Findlay
Her Majesty's Inspector