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Wendy Millbanks
Headteacher
Balcombe Church of England Controlled Primary School
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Balcombe
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Dear Mrs Millbanks

Ofsted visit to Balcombe Church of England Controlled Primary School

Following my visit with Louise Walker, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 20 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 and your 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 on 7 September 2020. All year groups attend on a full-time basis.
- Attendance is broadly in line with usual levels of attendance at the school for this time of year.
- Pupils are studying the school's usual range of subjects. Some aspects of the curriculum, such as singing and trips, are not being covered at present. Leaders anticipate a return to the full curriculum by the summer term 2021.
- Teachers know that pupils are finding some aspects of English more difficult than before the lockdown. For example, the younger pupils have forgotten some phonics skills, while some of the older pupils have fallen out of the habit of reading regularly. Leaders have allocated more time to the teaching of phonics, reading and spelling in the younger age groups, and to the teaching of reading and writing in Years 3 to 6.
- Teachers are continuously checking what pupils remember. They are recapping aspects of mathematics which pupils are finding more difficult following the lockdown. For example, teachers are giving the older pupils regular reminders about how to complete written calculations, while the younger pupils are having extra practice in using number bonds.
- Leaders are giving additional priority to physical education and the development of personal and social skills, such as resilience and perseverance.

Leaders explained that they have made these adjustments to support pupils as they readjust to school life.

- Leaders are developing plans to deliver the curriculum remotely if needed. They are planning to provide a combination of online learning, including introductions delivered by the teachers, with a range of practical and paper-based activities for pupils to complete 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 director of education for the diocese of Chichester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Sackett
Her Majesty's Inspector