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16 November 2020

Ruston Atkinson
Principal
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Dear Mr Atkinson

Ofsted visit to NCEA Duke's Secondary School

Following my visit with Christopher Pearce, 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, the senior leadership team and the senior 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:

- Pupils in Years 7 to 11 made a phased return by year group during the first week in September. All of these year groups were expected to return full time by the end of the week. Sixth-form students returned to school on 7 September.
- Attendance is below the school's normal attendance for this time of year. Leaders have put in place pastoral support for pupils and guidance for parents to encourage improvements in attendance. At the time of our visit, you had one Year 8 'bubble' of pupils isolating.
- Leaders told us that pupils are studying all the subjects in the planned curriculum. There has been some adaptation to the teaching of practical subjects, such as art, for Year 7 to Year 9 pupils. You outlined your three-phase plan to return to your usual curriculum delivery by the summer term 2021.
- Leaders explained how teachers are using their assessments of pupils' work in lessons to establish pupils' starting points. You are also using some standardised assessments, including for reading, with Year 7 pupils.
- Leaders are providing remote and online learning for pupils who need to self-isolate.

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 Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust, the director of

education for the diocese of Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector