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Mrs Ruth Whyte
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Low Grange Avenue
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Dear Mrs Whyte

Ofsted visit to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Jenny Thomas, 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 you and to the 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:

- You opened the school to all pupils on 4 September 2020. Pupils joined the school gradually over the first week. All pupils are expected to attend full time.
- Pupils' attendance is above that for the same period last academic year. During the visit, a Year 6 class 'bubble' was isolating at home due to COVID-19.
- Leaders explained that all pupils are studying the usual range of subjects. Leaders have adjusted curriculum content in some subjects, such as music. Leaders expect to return to their usual curriculum by spring term 2021.
- In September, you carried out formal checks in reading, writing, phonics and mathematics. Leaders have identified gaps in pupils' knowledge, due to the COVID-19 restrictions over the spring and summer terms 2020. You are providing catch-up sessions to help pupils make up for lost learning.
- You have prioritised a daily reading session for all pupils. You are focusing on developing pupils' inference skills. Pupils in Reception and Years 1 and 2 receive two extra phonics sessions each week to revisit missed learning.
- In mathematics, you are providing a revision session at the start of each day. This is to help pupils practise mathematical skills they may have forgotten. Pupils continue to learn mathematical knowledge for their current year group.
- In subjects such as history, geography and science, teachers have adjusted their lesson planning to allow pupils to catch up on the knowledge they have missed during COVID-19 restrictions. Leaders plan to check pupils' learning in these subjects later in the term.

- You have started to deliver subject content remotely in subjects such as writing, mathematics, reading and religious education. This includes homework and lessons for pupils who are at home due to COVID-19. You have plans to further develop this offer for all subjects across the curriculum.

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 Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stockton-on-Tees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alison Aitchison
Her Majesty's Inspector