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Ruth Gillett
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Gillett

Ofsted remote visit to Ferndale Primary School

Following my remote visit with Alun Williams, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 10 November 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. Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the school.

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 members of the senior leadership team. We did not speak to pupils.

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 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:

- Around two thirds of class 'bubbles' have spent some time isolating at home since the start of the autumn term 2020. Some pupils have isolated on more than one occasion.
- Pupils in all year groups are studying their usual range of subjects. You have changed the focus of learning in practical subjects. For example, in music, pupils are learning about the features of the clarinet without playing the instrument. Your aim is to return to the usual curriculum before the summer term 2021.
- Teachers have checked the gaps in pupils' learning as part of their normal teaching activities. These checks have shown you that pupils' starting points are lower than you would normally expect. You told us that additional support is in place to help pupils catch up.
- Leaders told us that reading is a priority subject for every year group. Teachers have identified that many pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 have not remembered some of their knowledge of phonics from the previous year. These pupils are receiving additional phonics lessons.
- Leaders told us that they have changed the order of some content within mathematics. These changes have been made so that pupils can study content that was missed during the spring and summer terms 2020, when the school was not open to all pupils.

- You have developed ways for pupils to access learning when at home. Teachers provide both live and recorded online lessons as part of this approach. You told us that you also provide work packs for those pupils who cannot access work online.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Leonard
Her Majesty's Inspector