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Eamon Connolly
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Connolly

Ofsted remote visit to St Thomas the Apostle School and Sixth Form College

Following my remote visit with Lucy Bruce, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 5 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, the executive headteacher and members of the senior leadership and pastoral teams. 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:

- The school opened to all pupils on 4 September 2020. They are expected to attend full time.
- Attendance is slightly lower than normal for this time of year. Home visits are used to alleviate any anxieties about attendance. Office staff provide support to parents in how to access COVID-19 testing if needed.
- Pupils are studying the full range of subjects, although some changes have been made to the order in which content is taught. In information technology lessons for Year 7, keeping safe online and how to use the school's preferred online platform have been prioritised. In science, limited access to specialist facilities, due to restricted pupil movement, has meant less practical work for Years 7 and 8. Teachers use video exemplars of practical work where necessary.
- Leaders have used the results of assessments from the end of the summer term to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. They are using this information to plan what now needs to be taught to address these gaps.
- Additional groups have been created in Years 7 and 8 in physical education. This is to enable social distancing. Leaders have purchased additional equipment for use in art lessons, to avoid the need to share resources.
- The way in which some subject content is delivered in Years 9 to 11 has changed. For example, geography fieldwork is now taught in the local area.

Additional staff have been employed so that teachers have more time to run one-to-one and small group tuition sessions.

- In the sixth form, all students are taking their chosen options. Year 12 students are being regularly assessed to ensure that courses remain suitable for their needs. Year 13 tutor time is now used for academic teaching and study.
- Leaders are prepared to move to a full online curriculum if necessary. Pupils would follow their normal timetable, with a mixture of live lessons and time for independent work. Leaders also plan to recreate the school community remotely, including assemblies and tutor periods.

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 executive headteacher, the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Southwark, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Southwark. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Strong
Her Majesty's Inspector