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23 November 2020

Karen Riddleston  
Head of School  
Richard De Clare Community Academy  
Parsonage Street  
Halstead  
Essex  
CO9 2JT

Dear Ms Riddleston

### **Ofsted visit to Richard De Clare Community Academy**

Following my visit with John Mitcheson, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 3 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.

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 the executive headteacher. 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 (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 3 September 2020.
- Attendance is lower than it was at this time last year. There remain a few pupils who are not in school. Leaders are providing support for these pupils.
- Pupils are studying the usual range of subjects. Teachers have made some changes to the order in which they teach certain knowledge. Pupils are not swimming in physical education, and some practical skills in music and food technology are not being taught until later in the year.
- Teachers have carried out checks on what pupils know to decide which areas of reading and phonics need to be a focus of their lessons. Leaders are using the COVID-19 catch-up premium funding to buy additional books and provide extra support for pupils who have fallen behind in reading.
- Teachers have checked what pupils remember in mathematics. They are revisiting multiplication tables to support pupils' problem-solving skills.
- Some pupils did not regularly practise writing when they were not in school. Teachers have planned additional writing opportunities in English lessons and in other subjects.
- Staff have prepared home-learning packs to support pupils who may have to work at home. Teachers are also using online programmes to support pupils with their spelling and mathematics. Leaders have plans to increase the online education they offer in the future.

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 interim executive board, the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the North Essex Multi-Academy Trust (NEMAT), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Liz Smith  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**