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Vicky Neale
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Neale

Ofsted remote visit to Bury St Edmunds County Upper School

Following my remote visit with Liz Smith, 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, your deputy headteacher and your leader responsible for safeguarding. 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 fully on 7 September 2020.
- The vast majority of pupils have returned to school. A very small proportion of pupils with health issues are currently following a personalised, part-time timetable. Current attendance is slightly lower than the normal attendance for this time of year.
- Pupils are studying the usual range of subjects. Practical learning in some subjects has been paused. Educational visits are not taking place.
- Year 9 pupils have completed tests in English, mathematics and science. Staff are awaiting the results of these tests to inform the next stage of their planning of pupils' learning.
- A small proportion of Year 11 pupils have dropped one of their practical-based GCSE subjects to help them focus on their other studies. However, they continue to study at least eight GCSEs including English and mathematics.
- Mock examinations in English and mathematics, usually held towards the end of the autumn term, were brought forward to provide an early indication of how well Year 11 pupils are learning, and to identify where further support is needed. Assessments made during lessons in all subjects are being used to inform leaders of how well Year 10 pupils are currently doing.
- In the sixth form, students continue to study the A-levels they have chosen. Leaders feel that additional work provided during the summer term, for Year

11 pupils intending to stay on in the sixth form, has prepared them well for A-level study in Year 12.

- Recent training has enabled staff to develop new approaches to remote learning. This is being developed further to include a wider range of live videos of learning during lessons.

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 chief executive officer of the Unity Multi-Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector