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Jim Balmbra
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Balmbra

Ofsted remote visit to Castle Newnham School

Following my remote visit with Paul Wilson, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 11 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 federation principal, the deputy headteacher and the assistant 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 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:

- At the time of the visit, a Year 6 class had just started a period of isolation. Since the start of the academic year, approximately 5% of pupils have had to work at home due to isolation.
- Leaders are using the school's curriculum plans to teach the full range of subjects.
- In phonics, teachers are using checks to identify what pupils need to do next to remain on track in their learning. Teachers are planning more reading activities to support pupils with their understanding of the words they read and the meaning of the text.
- You have continued to use your usual approaches in mathematics to find out what pupils remember. Teachers are using assessment results to alter their plans and provide help to pupils who need additional support. In mathematics lessons, there is a greater focus on pupils' understanding of place value and calculation skills.
- Teachers are asking questions and using mini quizzes to find out what important knowledge pupils have remembered across all subjects in the

curriculum. Leaders have changed the order in which content is taught in some subjects, such as science and physical education.

- Remote education has been provided for pupils who have had to self-isolate and are absent from school. Your plans provide activities that a pupil would expect to cover in a typical school day. Pupils are free to choose the order in which they complete these activities.
- Teachers have received training in your chosen approach to providing remote learning. The work they plan is matched to leaders' expectations of the planned 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 governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bedford Borough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector