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Lisa Ashton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ashton

Ofsted remote visit to St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Blackhall

Following my remote visit with Matthew Vellensworth, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 19 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 deputy headteacher and subject leaders for English, mathematics, geography and modern foreign languages. 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 our visit, there were a small number of pupils self-isolating. Since the start of term, a small minority of pupils have had to work from home due to COVID-19. You have not had to isolate a 'bubble' of pupils.
- Pupils are not yet studying the full range of curriculum subjects. For example, modern foreign language lessons for pupils in Years 3 to 6 are not taking place. You explained that you are providing opportunities for pupils to practise their French at other times in the school day, for example counting in mathematics. You told us that teachers are now spending more time teaching reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers have listened to pupils read individually, and pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 have been tested on their phonic knowledge. You told us that teachers have used this information to inform their reading and phonics plans. Where reading checks in Years 3 to 6 require pupils to have additional support, you are using a computer program to support them.
- Teachers have checked pupils' mathematical knowledge through short tests and tasks. You explained that these checks showed that pupils could not remember some basic skills, therefore teachers have increased the time they

spend teaching mathematics each week. You told us that pupils take part in intervention sessions to revisit learning they have forgotten.

- You have increased the amount of physical education (PE) teaching each week to help pupils get more exercise. You said that lessons focus on being active and that you allow pupils to come dressed in their PE clothes on Monday and Friday to support this.
- You are providing remote learning for absent pupils. You told us that you use a mixture of paper-based tasks and online learning so that pupils can access similar lessons to pupils in school. You told us that this approach is the same for pupils of all ages.
- You plan to provide live online lessons soon. You explained that home internet access for some pupils is a barrier to them being able to access some of your digital education offer.

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 director of education for the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Durham local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector