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Zoe Thewlis
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Dear Mrs Thewlis

Ofsted remote visit to Birchfield Primary School

Following my remote visit with Nicola Harwood, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 24 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, an assistant headteacher and the pastoral leader. 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 3 September 2020. Since then every year-group 'bubble', including the Nursery, has been sent home at different stages of the term to self-isolate because of COVID-19. At the time of this remote visit, the Reception classes, as well as the Year 3 and 4 bubbles, were self-isolating. Reception and Year 3 have had to do this twice this term.
- Attendance is lower compared to this time last year. Given that all year groups have self-isolated at some point, pupils have had to do some of their school work at home.
- Pupils are studying all their usual subjects, with some, such as physical education (PE), having a reduced amount of time. Instead of two sessions, PE has been reduced to one weekly lesson.
- Teachers have checked how much learning pupils have missed or forgotten. Your leaders told us that your focus is on continuing what you call an 'enquiry-based curriculum'. The staff have made choices about what to teach this term and what to leave out to help pupils catch up.
- You have decided that pupils will continue using last year's workbooks to revisit and build on what they have covered before. Teachers found that pupils got out of the habit of reading often enough, so they lacked confidence and fluency. When writing independently, you told us that pupils forgot some grammar, spelling and punctuation rules. Teachers are incorporating additional reading and writing tasks into other subjects, such as history. For example, in

Year 6, pupils are studying World War II and reading a book by Emma Carroll called 'Letters from the lighthouse', which is set in the same period as their history topic.

- In Nursery and Reception, the staff focus on developing children's speech, language, communication and social skills to help them settle into school. Additional phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) sessions have been planned for Year 1 and 2 pupils to help them catch up, as they have missed some phases of development in phonics. Leaders told us that in mathematics pupils need more support as they lack the ability and confidence to apply their number skills when solving problems.
- Your staff have prepared what you call 'home-learning packs'. These are home-learning resources for pupils and their families to use when not in school. These include online and paper-based resources for families to collect or access on the school's website. Teachers are also providing online learning on the school's website when pupils are self-isolating at home.

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 board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Prince Albert Community Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector