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Becca Williams
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Dear Mrs Williams

Ofsted remote visit to Blackthorn Primary School

Following my remote visit with Christine Watkins, 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 leader responsible for safeguarding and the curriculum leader for physical education. 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:

- A high proportion of pupils have had to work at home since the start of term. The Year 5 'bubble' has been sent home twice. Attendance for all pupils is above that usually seen for this time of year.
- Pupils are studying the usual range of subjects. Teachers are dedicating more time to the teaching of English and mathematics in all year groups. Singing and swimming are not currently being taught, but leaders plan to return to these activities later in the year.
- Teachers in Years 1 and 2 checked pupils' phonic knowledge as soon as the pupils returned to school. Leaders have made sure that pupils are receiving extra phonics lessons to help them catch up.
- Teachers have assessed pupils' knowledge and understanding in reading, writing and spelling. Pupils who have fallen behind are receiving support.
- Teachers have identified that pupils' arithmetic skills are not as strong as they should be. Pupils are receiving support to develop their arithmetic skills.
- Across the wider curriculum, leaders are prioritising pupils' physical health and well-being. They recognise that some pupils' fitness levels have dropped. For this reason, pupils now have more opportunities to exercise and get fit.
- Leaders have developed plans to deliver the curriculum remotely, if needed. Remote education is already offered to a small number of pupils who are self-isolating. Leaders have made sure that what pupils learn at home is closely matched to what they would learn if they were in school.

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 Northampton Primary Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Damien Turrell
Her Majesty's Inspector