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Jo Harlow
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Dear Ms Harlow

Ofsted remote visit to Merrill Academy

Following my remote visit with Peter Stonier, 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 the senior leadership team. 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 small group of Year 10 pupils were isolating at home. Since September 2020, approximately half of the pupils have had to learn from home, at some point. For the majority of these pupils, this was for a short period of time.
- All pupils are studying their usual range of subjects. Pupils in Year 11 are continuing to study the subjects they chose for their GCSE and other examinations.
- In some subjects, some practical elements of the curriculum are not currently being delivered. Plans are in place to return to the usual curriculum and arrangements by the summer term 2021.
- Some aspects of the wider curriculum are being delivered remotely. For example, Year 7 pupils are to attend a virtual personal development workshop, and Year 11 pupils are to have virtual mock interviews in January.
- Teachers have carried out formal assessments for all pupils in English and mathematics. Teachers are using ongoing assessments in other subjects to adapt their plans to fill in the gaps in pupils' knowledge.
- Remote education is provided for pupils who are learning at home. Pupils use both paper-based materials and digital resources. Pupils are expected to complete work in the same subjects that they would usually study in school. All pupils have been provided with materials to help them learn at home. Some pupils have also been provided with technology to help them to access the internet.

- A small number of staff who are isolating at home have delivered live lessons to pupils via an online system. Plans are in place to roll this out more widely, should it be necessary in the future. Staff have received training to support the effective delivery of the remote 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 board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Northworthy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Derby. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector