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Claire O'Donnell
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs O'Donnell

Ofsted remote visit to St Columba's Catholic Primary School

Following my remote visit with John Donald, 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 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:

- Since the start of term, approximately half of the pupils in the school have spent some time working from home.
- You explained that pupils are studying their usual range of curriculum subjects. However, less time is being given to the teaching of some subjects, such as history and geography, to allow extra time for English and mathematics lessons. You plan to return to the school's normal curriculum by summer 2021.
- In reading, teachers have carried out checks to identify what knowledge pupils have remembered since March 2020. You told us that this is helping teachers to establish pupils' new starting points. Teachers are providing pupils, in Years 1, 2 and 3, with additional phonics sessions to help them to catch up with missed learning.
- Teachers' checks on pupils' learning in mathematics show that, across the school, pupils have forgotten some of their previous learning. In the Reception class, teachers are focusing on mathematical language. Teachers, in Years 1 to 6, are providing additional teaching sessions to help pupils catch up with mathematical learning that they have missed.

- In subjects other than English and mathematics, teachers are adapting their curriculum plans to make sure that pupils can catch up with lost learning.
- Teachers provide pupils with a timetable of activities to follow when they are working at home. You explained that, where possible, these activities mirror the work being completed in school by the rest of the class. Staff provide advice to parents, to help them to support their children when they are working remotely.

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 Lancaster, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Naomi Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector