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4 January 2021

Manjit Hazle
Principal
Mark Hall Academy
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Dear Mrs Hazle

Ofsted remote visit to Mark Hall Academy

Following my remote visit with Liz Smith, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 1 December 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.

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 senior leadership team, the executive principal from the Academy Transformation Trust who is supporting school improvement, and the school leader responsible for safeguarding. We did not speak to pupils because of the protective measures in place.

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 (coronavirus) 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, the pupils in Years 10 and 11 were isolating. Since September 2020, groups in Years 7, 8 and 9 have had to learn from home because of contact with, or staff absence due to, the virus. This represents just under half of the total number of pupils on the school's roll.
- In Years 7 to 11, pupils are studying most of the subjects that were previously offered. In some subjects, such as art and design and technology, pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 have more restricted access to practical activities this year. This is because some lessons take place in standard classrooms now rather than in specialist areas.
- Most pupils in Year 11 are following the same GCSE programmes that they were taught last year. Opportunities for work experience for pupils in Year 10 are currently suspended.
- In all year groups, teachers make checks to find out how much pupils remember from previous learning so that they can help them to catch up. In Years 7 to 9, there is a focus on reading, writing and mathematics. Extending pupils' ability to write at length and improving their reading skills are key priorities.
- In Years 10 and 11, staff are prioritising the things that pupils need to learn for their examination courses, especially in English, mathematics and science.

- A programme of remote education is available to support pupils who are learning from home. The work set is linked to the lessons that pupils would normally be studying in school. Where pupils have difficulties in accessing learning online at home, leaders have acted to provide additional support, including the loan of laptops if needed.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector