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Tim Bennett
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Dear Mr Bennett

Ofsted remote visit to Windlestone School

Following my remote visit with Graham Findlay, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 26 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 senior leader seconded to the school from the local authority, and the leader of information technology. 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:

- You told us that pupils' attendance is slightly lower than this time last year. No bubbles have had to work from home this term. A small number of pupils, however, have worked from home for short periods of time since September.
- Pupils are studying their usual range of subjects, but you have made some adjustments to a few subjects. You said pupils in Years 7 to 9, for example, currently have limited access to some resources in practical subjects such as science. You aim to return all pupils to their usual curriculum by summer 2021.
- Leaders have prioritised supporting pupils' mental health and well-being. You explained that some pupils were anxious about the risks associated with COVID-19 and have sought reassurance about returning to school safely. Teachers have set aside extra time to talk with pupils and their families.
- Teachers checked pupils' new starting points in English and mathematics. In Years 7 to 9, you are focusing on reading and basic number knowledge and skills. This is because you found that pupils have forgotten or missed some of the important content and knowledge in each subject.
- In Years 10 and 11, teachers are supporting pupils to catch up with any lost or missed knowledge needed for examinations. For example, some pupils are having extra support with their extended writing in subjects such as history. You explained that you want to support and prepare Year 11 for the next stage in their education, training or careers.

- Digital technology is used to support pupils working from home. You told us that pupils also have access to paper-based work and are directed to online resources and websites. You said that you are developing and improving your remote education offer to pupils across subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector