

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



21 December 2020

Mrs Alison Sinclair  
Principal  
Gurney Pease Academy  
Dodsworth Street  
Darlington  
County Durham  
DL1 2NG

Dear Mrs Sinclair

### **Ofsted visit to Gurney Pease Academy**

Following my visit with Jean Watt, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 3 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. 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 Nursery and the Reception Year class 'bubbles' were isolating. These children were learning from home, as all staff that work with these year groups were also isolating. Around half of all pupils have accessed education remotely at some point since the start of term.
- Pupils are studying most of the subjects that make up the school's usual curriculum, with the exception of art and design technology. You explained that you intend to teach the missed content in these subjects through themed days in the spring term. Teachers are adapting how they teach content in subjects such as physical education (PE) and computing. You plan to return to the school's usual curriculum by summer 2021.
- Teachers have assessed pupils' new starting points in reading. In Year 1, pupils have regressed in their phonic knowledge and as a result, teachers are spending additional time teaching phonics. A small number of pupils in Years 2 and 3 are receiving extra support to catch up in their phonics.
- In mathematics, teachers' checks show that in Years 1 and 2 some pupils have gaps in their number recognition and mathematical fluency. Some older pupils have gaps in their knowledge of place value and times tables. Teachers are revisiting content taught previously to make sure that pupils are secure in these mathematical concepts before moving on to teach new concepts.
- In the wider curriculum, you are prioritising the teaching of science with a focus on practical activities. You explained that you have prioritised pupils' well-being and that you have placed a greater focus on the teaching of PE.

- You have developed systems to teach parts of the curriculum remotely when pupils are not in school. This learning matches what is being taught in class and is a blend of online and paper-based learning. You have provided pupils with resources to support their learning when studying from home.

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, chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Education Village multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gill Wild  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**