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Francesca Heslop
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Heslop

Ofsted remote visit to St James' RC Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my remote visit with Jean Watt, 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. 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 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 Year 2 and Year 5 'bubble' of pupils were self-isolating at home. Approximately three quarters of pupils have had to learn from home at some point since September. Year 5 pupils have been particularly affected by the need to self-isolate at home.
- Pupils are studying their usual range of subjects. Teachers are providing additional time in English and mathematics to address gaps in pupils' knowledge. Less time is being spent on some other subjects. Leaders plan to return pupils to their usual curriculum by the summer term 2021.
- Teachers are providing an increased focus on pupils' phonics knowledge and reading skills. This is because some pupils are less secure in these areas than they were previously. Identified pupils in Years 3 to 5 are accessing additional sessions to support their gaps in reading.
- Teachers have identified areas where pupils' knowledge in mathematics is less secure than before. You explained that teachers are spending more time in the day teaching mathematics, to address such gaps.
- In art, pupils have missed the planned curriculum over the summer. Leaders are providing an extra range of opportunities and experiences for pupils to develop their skills in art.
- Leaders provide pupils who are learning at home with activities that broadly reflect schoolwork. Pupils can share work completed at home with

their teachers. Teachers check how successful pupils have been with the work set at home.

- Teachers deliver daily phonics lessons online to younger pupils self-isolating in a bubble. All pupils can access electronic reading books that match their reading age. Books are also available as hard copies.

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 Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for South Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Thomas
Her Majesty's Inspector