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5 January 2021

Gemma Ackred  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Ackred

### **Ofsted visit to St Thomas More High School**

Following my visit with Liz Smith, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 10 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 and other leaders, including those with responsibility for safeguarding arrangements. 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:**

- Approximately 12% of pupils have had to learn from home since the start of term. No whole year-group 'bubbles' have had to learn from home.
- Most pupils are studying their usual range of subjects. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have extra time learning English and mathematics. There is less time than usual for teaching personal, social, health and economic education. Some topics in some subjects are being taught in a different order to normal.
- Some pupils arrived in Year 7 with weaker writing skills than would normally be the case. Some pupils in Year 8 have not developed the same level of reading comprehension as the school would normally expect at this time. Leaders have adjusted the English curriculum to make sure that pupils revisit key knowledge more often than is usual.
- Leaders checked pupils' level of understanding in all subjects. In Years 11 and 13, these assessments took place earlier than usual in the autumn term. Leaders and teachers are adjusting what pupils work on this academic year in light of the information these gave them.
- When individual pupils have to learn from home, they learn the same content as they would in school. Sometimes they have 'live' lessons, sometimes they have recorded lessons, and sometimes they complete other work which is set for them.
- If a bubble has to isolate in the future, leaders plan that pupils would follow their normal timetable. Teachers plan to deliver live lessons through video

conferencing. Work would be set and marked in line with the school's normal policy.

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 Assisi Catholic Trust (a multi-academy trust), the director of education for the Diocese of Brentwood, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Southend-on-Sea. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Hemmings  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**