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Maggie Cole
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cole

Ofsted visit to St Thomas C of E Primary School

Following my visit with Ahmed Marikar, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 21 October 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 the school's pastoral leader. 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:

- The school re-opened on 2 September 2020. You expect all pupils to attend full time.
- Pupils' attendance is in line with their usual attendance for this time of year.
- Pupils are studying most of their usual range of subjects. At present, staff only teach woodland activities to children in Nursery and the Reception Year. Staff are giving greater attention to all pupils' personal, social and emotional development to help pupils to settle back into their time at school. You are planning for all pupils to return to the usual school curriculum by spring 2021.
- Teachers are amending planned work where assessments highlight that pupils lost ground in their learning during the period when schools were only open to some pupils due to COVID-19 restrictions. For example, in reading, staff give pupils increased practice to explain the meaning of fiction books.
- In mathematics, teachers are revisiting some topics that pupils have not remembered very well since March 2020. For instance, in Year 4, teachers are planning for pupils to re-study fractions in greater depth as this was an area that they did not fully understand in Year 3 due to the COVID-19 restrictions.
- Teachers have increased the amount of time they spend on science investigations because they have identified some new gaps in pupils' practical understanding of different concepts.
- You have plans in place for pupils to study each subject at home if this is needed. Staff have prepared work to upload to the school's online systems and website. They plan to also provide work on paper for pupils to take 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, the director of education for the diocese of Carlisle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector