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Mark Jones
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Dear Mr Jones

Ofsted remote visit to Belmont Castle Academy

Following my remote visit with Liz Smith, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 24 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 vice principal, the attendance officer, the safeguarding and welfare officer, and the chair of governors. 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, one Year 2 class 'bubble' and all of the Year 6 class bubbles were isolating for a two-week period. Approximately a sixth of pupils have had to learn from home since the start of the autumn term.
- Pupils are learning the usual range of subjects. Teachers have changed the order in which they teach some of the planned subject content. Pupils are not having swimming lessons until later in the year.
- At the beginning of the autumn term, teachers checked how well pupils were reading. Pupils in Year 1 are revisiting some of the phonics knowledge they have previously learned, before they move on to learning new sounds.
- Teachers are giving pupils opportunities to write for longer periods of time. Pupils are being reminded how to use the vocabulary and grammar they learned before in their writing. Teachers are checking what pupils remember and what learning needs to be revisited.
- Following their checks, teachers have found that pupils have forgotten some of their mathematical knowledge. Teachers are revisiting place value and multiplication tables to help pupils calculate accurately when solving number problems. Year 4 pupils will learn about shape and measure in the spring term to make up for learning they missed when they were in Year 3.

- Younger pupils are spending more time on personal, social and health education. Teachers have built in more time to plan activities that will support pupils to talk about how they are feeling.
- Leaders found that pupils had not done as much physical activity while they were not in school. In physical education, time is being spent giving pupils more opportunity to build up their physical fitness.
- Teachers plan online and paper-based work for pupils who have to learn at home. This learning is similar to what pupils would be learning if they were in school. For the Year 6 pupils who are currently isolating, teachers are teaching 'live' online lessons. Leaders have purchased additional devices to support pupils learning at 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 regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Thurrock. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Maureen Su
Her Majesty's Inspector