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15 July 2021

Kyra Siddall-Ward  
Stafford Junior School  
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Eastbourne  
East Sussex  
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Dear Mrs Siddall-Ward

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Stafford Junior School**

Following my visit with Alice Roberts, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and Bruce Waelend, Ofsted Inspector (OI), to your school on 22 and 23 June 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2020. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

**Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.**

**The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.**

**The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.**

**The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.**

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Cox  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 June 2021**

### **Context**

Since the previous inspection in January 2020, there have been many changes to leadership. In April 2020, the interim executive headteacher was seconded from the Cavendish Education Trust. The head of school took up her post in January 2021. A new leader for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has been appointed to the school.

An interim executive board (IEB) was formed in March 2020. Plans are on track for the school to join a trust in September 2021. Staff absence is high. At the time of the inspection, five classes were being taught by temporary supply staff.

During the autumn term 2020, there was a fire at the school. For approximately three weeks, some classes were educated at other local schools. Some parts of the school, including the hall and office spaces, remain closed off while repairs are completed.

### **The progress made towards the removal of special measures**

New leaders are unswerving in their ambition and moral purpose to improve the quality of education at the school. They show remarkable resolve and resilience during this challenging period for the school. Leaders know what needs to improve. They are focusing on the most pressing priorities. These include pupils' behaviour, teaching and provision for pupils with SEND. Turbulence in staffing has hampered some aspects of leaders' strategic work. This is because they have needed to spend much of their time on the day-to-day management of the school.

Leaders have set high expectations for pupils' behaviour. They have implemented a new behaviour policy and daily routines. Improved arrangements for play and lunchtimes are now well established. Leaders have trained teachers in the school's new approach. Some staff, including temporary and support staff, have not yet had this training. This means that the school's new approach is not understood or implemented well by everyone.

There are now fewer incidents of very poor behaviour and exclusions have decreased. Most classrooms are orderly. Even so, leaders know that improvements remain fragile. Frequent changes of staff have been unsettling. This is especially so for those pupils who need support to manage their behaviour. Although improving significantly, there are still some occasions when the behaviour of a few pupils disrupts learning.

Leaders have provided comprehensive coaching and support to improve teachers' knowledge and skills. They have raised expectations and are addressing

underperformance. Leaders have also improved the physical environment in classrooms and corridors. This has helped to lift spirits and expectations. Nonetheless, successive changes of staff have slowed the pace of leaders' work to improve the quality of education that pupils receive.

Provision for reading and the school's work to promote reading for pleasure have strengthened. There is now a more consistent approach to developing pupils' comprehension. Pupils enjoy reading a wide range of quality narrative texts. However, the curriculum for pupils in the nurture provision is not based on the same high-quality texts. Leaders have also not yet been able to give enough attention to supporting pupils at an early stage of reading. There is not a structured approach to helping pupils who do not have a secure knowledge of phonics. Therefore, important elements of the reading curriculum are not yet in place.

In mathematics, leaders are beginning to build an effective curriculum. Plans include appropriate content and set out logical sequences of learning. Most teachers use assessments to check that pupils have understood important content. This is helping them to identify and address gaps in pupils' understanding. Leaders are adapting the curriculum to reflect these gaps. They are prioritising the most important knowledge that pupils need to learn before the end of this school year.

The curriculum in most other subjects lacks coherence and is not well planned or taught. Plans do not identify the content pupils will learn or how knowledge builds towards curriculum goals. Work to build an effective curriculum has stalled. This is because leaders have been dealing with more immediate issues, such as staffing and disruption following the fire. However, leaders have purchased a suitable curriculum for personal, social and health education. This provides a helpful curriculum framework for teachers to plan from.

There is a long legacy of poor support for pupils with SEND. New leaders are working hard to put in place better systems to identify and provide support for pupils' needs. However, improvements are at an early stage of development. Currently, leaders are focusing on support for pupils whose needs give rise to challenging behaviour. Leaders accept that the school is not yet meeting the needs of pupils with SEND well enough.

Since the previous inspection, governance has improved. Members of the IEB bring considerable experience and expertise to their work. They have a strong understanding of the school's performance. Members know that there are still significant weaknesses in the quality of education at the school. They have aligned their work to the most important priorities for the school. Members ensure that safeguarding remains high on their agenda. They keep this aspect of the school under regular scrutiny. Members and leaders are taking action to stabilise staffing. They have secured permanent teaching staff for September.

It has been a very uncertain period for staff and the school community. Some staff express concern about workload and the behaviour of some pupils. However, most staff feel that leaders do their best to support them and manage their workload.

Parental confidence in the school is at a low ebb. Many parents express concern about the frequent changes of staff, pupils' behaviour and support for pupils with SEND. Some parents are also concerned that their children do not feel safe in school. Inspectors share some of the concerns raised by parents about staff changes and support for pupils with SEND. However, inspectors' findings do not reflect parents' views about safeguarding. Leaders have implemented strong safeguarding practices and appropriate support for pupils' well-being. All pupils spoken to during the inspection told inspectors that they feel safe in school.

### **Additional support**

The local authority has provided intensive support to the school to ease the school's pathway to becoming an academy. The local authority and the Cavendish Education Trust are providing financial and back-office support. Close partnership working between the IEB and the trust is paving the way for a smooth transition. Leaders are working more closely with their counterparts in the trust. This is helping to develop their expertise and working practices.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors held meetings with the executive headteacher, the head of school, other senior leaders and two members of the IEB to discuss leaders' actions. An inspector held an online discussion with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also met with staff, three groups of pupils and spoke to pupils during lesson visits and at other times of the day, such as lunchtimes. They visited lessons to observe pupils' learning and behaviour, heard pupils read to staff and reviewed pupils' work in books. Inspectors reviewed a wide range of school documents, including plans for improvement and curriculum plans. Inspectors met with the designated lead for safeguarding and reviewed safeguarding information, including the school's records of recruitment checks.

Inspectors spoke with parents at the start of the second day of the inspection. They took into account the 60 responses to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, and the 20 free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the 23 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.