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Laura Slinn
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Dear Mrs Laura Slinn

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Cherry Trees School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 15 November 2022 on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in February 2022.

During the inspection, Ian Hardman His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you and multi-academy trust (MAT) representatives the actions taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We also included visits to classrooms, conversations with teachers, discussions with governors and a review of the school's development plans and current curriculum planning documents. I have considered all of this in coming to my judgement.

Cherry Trees remains inadequate and has serious weaknesses. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the last inspection, there has been a significant change in the leadership of the multi-academy trust. A new chief executive officer is working closely with you and the school to drive improvements. Consequently, there is greater stability in the support and

challenge the school receives. Supported by the MAT, you have agreed on plans to further develop leadership capacity at the school. This is already being realised with specialist advisors and other school leaders from the MAT working alongside staff from Cherry Trees. Plans have also been agreed upon to extend the buildings at the school to provide larger classrooms and a more bespoke learning environment for pupils.

You have now created long-term plans for all subjects in the curriculum. These plans are ambitious and set high expectations for pupils. You have implemented new monitoring systems to identify how well the curriculum is taught. Consequently, when needed, you have provided staff with additional training. However, in some cases, our classroom visits demonstrated that what was taught did not always link to the long-term plans. Also, while it was evident that staff care for the pupils, the curriculum is not always adapted well for the pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, staff are attentive to pupils, but they sometimes use too many words when teaching new knowledge or supporting pupils around the school. This makes learning harder for those pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties or delays.

Since the last inspection, you have continued to raise the profile of reading, and develop staff's expertise to teach it. You have implemented a new approach to the phonics curriculum. Staff have all had the necessary training to teach this curriculum. The school has invested a considerable amount of time and money to ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of books. There is a helpful new system in place for staff to record their observations of pupils' reading. This allows staff to focus more on the skills that pupils have mastered. However, when we listened to some pupils reading to a familiar adult, it was apparent that, sometimes, the books were not well matched to the sounds that pupils are learning.

The changes you have made to the early years provision are very positive. The environment has been carefully considered and adapted to meet the needs of those children with sensory processing difficulties. You have rightly focused on developing routines and expectations for those children who find new and different things challenging. Carefully chosen resources help to focus children's learning and develop their early independence. There is evidence that early communication is being prioritised, with symbols and signing, to support children's understanding.

You have put in place some strong plans for how you intend to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. Your curriculum for cultural capital sets out what experiences you want the pupils to have and when they will have them. Pupils access opportunities, such as play therapy, music therapy, and horse riding at the local stables. Before- and after-school clubs provide opportunities for pupils to develop football and dance skills and other interests. Appropriately planned lessons in personal, social, health and economic education aim to develop pupils' independence, resilience and understanding of the world around them.

Since the last inspection, you have demonstrated tenacity and drive for change. The positive steps already made show that the capacity to improve further is developing well.

Your 'rapid action' plans demonstrate an urgency to correct weaknesses, and resulting actions show the fast pace of change. Parents are optimistic about the changes made and feel that their children's experiences improve daily. Staff feel well supported in terms of training and support in classrooms. When some raised concerns to leaders about workload, they felt that leaders were supportive and keen to find solutions. They are particularly positive about how leaders have worked with them to develop the curriculum. There remains a considerable amount of work to ensure that your curriculum's implementation matches the high expectations you have set. However, this has been a solid and positive start.

Governors have a clear understanding of the journey the school has been on. They are rightly pleased with developments at the school but know there is more to be done. They talked about the different actions that leaders have completed. They regularly attend the school to check on how things are developing. Consequently, they have a precise understanding of the actions that have been completed. Leaders and governors talked and reflected on the changes made. However, their written evaluations do not always clearly identify the impact of such changes and what is required for the school to be good.

You have worked closely with experienced and knowledgeable officers from the MAT. At a difficult time for the school, they have been frequent visitors, providing insight, challenge and encouraging words when needed. Opportunities to work with other schools across the MAT have been promoted and utilised. Curriculum development days and working parties mean that the school benefits from a broader knowledge base and expertise. Your drive to make the necessary improvements are mirrored by the expectation and support from the MAT.

Since the last inspection, you have established strong systems for monitoring safeguarding at the school. A recently appointed, experienced safeguarding specialist has improved capacity and expertise. You are currently reviewing the safeguarding policy to ensure that it reflects the broad range of needs of the pupils and the resulting expectations on all staff. The staff we spoke to know their safeguarding responsibilities well and report concerns quickly. These concerns are closely monitored and when needed, staff are provided with more training or support, knowing how to report potential safeguarding incidents.

When needed, you have commissioned support from external advisors and consultants. Supported by the MAT, you have focused this work on the key priorities for improvement. For example, consultants have provided advice to leaders about the curriculum or early years development. You are positive about the impact of this work and feel that it has helped the school move forward.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Endeavour multi-academy trust, the regional school's commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Pollitt
His Majesty's Inspector