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24 November 2022

Manny Kelay  
Principal  
Thorns Collegiate Academy  
Stockwell Avenue  
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Brierley Hill  
West Midlands  
DY5 2NU

Dear Mr Kelay

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Thorns Collegiate Academy**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 23 and 24 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 require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in February 2022.

During the inspection, Huw Bishop, Ofsted Inspector (OI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the CEO of the multi-academy trust, trustees and local governors the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited lessons, met with staff, spoke to pupils, viewed pupils' work and scrutinised documentation. I have considered all of this in coming to my judgement.

**Thorns Collegiate Academy remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.**

**I am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.**

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

Following the previous inspection, trust leaders have acted swiftly. They have strengthened leadership and increased the capacity to bring about change. This includes

new appointments to the school leadership team, a new designated safeguarding leader and an experienced special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator (SENCo). You have also recruited staff to help address areas of significant weakness, for instance appointing an attendance officer, family liaison worker and literacy leader. In addition, you have made changes to the physical spaces in the school to help staff with their work. You have also created a new inclusion base for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

You have developed a detailed plan for improving the school. This goes beyond simply refining existing plans. Instead, you have focused on the fundamental issues that you need to address. You have focused on improving the quality of pupils' education and addressing the specific areas of weakness identified during the previous inspection. However, despite everyone working at pace to make the school better, it is simply too soon to see the sustained impact of leaders' actions.

Subject leaders continue to review and develop the curriculum in all subjects. You know that there is significant variation in the quality of the curriculum across subjects. Leaders are implementing plans to address this.

Teachers use checks in lessons and formal tests to help identify how well pupils have learned the curriculum. Teachers of the 'literacy4life' curriculum receive support from relevant subject leaders to help them check pupils' learning. However, these assessments do not identify the intricate misconceptions that pupils can develop. As a result, teachers do not always know how to adapt and reshape learning in lessons.

You have correctly highlighted reading as an important issue. Leaders have devised a 'reading roadmap' to bring about change. They are implementing this in a sensible and cumulative way. This aims to place reading at the heart of the school. For instance, all teachers now read to pupils and have had training to help them do this well. However, pupils at the early stages of reading do not get the support they need. This means that pupils with gaps in their phonics knowledge struggle to read fluently. Leaders have identified these pupils and training for staff is underway. However, work to support these pupils has not yet taken place but is planned to commence in the spring term.

The new SENCo and her team have taken swift action to begin to address the inadequacies in provision for pupils with SEND. All pupils with an education, health and care plan have had these reviewed. Leaders have also scrutinised the SEND register. It is now accurate and up to date. Leaders are keen to engage parents and carers, for example by running information evenings to inform them of recent changes. Leaders have trained teachers and support staff to help them use updated 'pupil passports' to help meet pupils' needs in lessons. However, there remains much to do. Leaders have not evaluated how effectively teachers use the information provided. Additionally, leaders with responsibility for SEND and pupils' behaviour do not work closely to ensure that pupils with SEND get the support they need. Leaders do not ensure that pupils with SEND take part in clubs and activities outside the classroom.

Previous systems for managing pupils' behaviour have not been effective. There have been too many instances of pupils' poor behaviour disrupting the learning of others. Too many pupils have been removed from lessons and did not get the help they need to improve their behaviour. You have recognised this. At the time of the inspection, you had just introduced a new approach to managing pupils' behaviour. This aims to ensure that all pupils can learn in lessons and pupils who need support to improve their behaviour get the help they need. You know that this new approach must be monitored closely to check that it is benefiting all pupils.

Leaders have reacted strategically to begin to address pupils' low attendance. Attendance, pastoral and SEND leaders meet regularly to scrutinise attendance information. They use this information well and staff act quickly if a pupil's attendance begins to decline. Pupils' good attendance is valued and celebrated. While improving, pupils' attendance is still too low and the number of pupils who are persistently absent is too high.

Support from the trust is helping the school to improve. Leaders at all levels are working collaboratively with trust staff and with staff from other schools. Trustees and local governors are asking leaders to show them evidence of reported improvements. This is helping leaders to focus on the right things. Staff appreciate this support and value the training they receive. In making improvements, you have been conscious of the pressure on staff. Staff see leaders as being mindful of their workload. As a result, staff are working together to help improve the school.

You rightly prioritised safeguarding following the last inspection. Leaders have delivered training to staff. As a result, staff are clear about the need to report all concerns and the systems for doing so. This helps leaders to identify any pupils who may need help or may be at risk of harm. Safeguarding is now seen as everybody's responsibility in school. The safeguarding culture has improved significantly. However, leaders do not have sufficient written assurances that vulnerable pupils being educated off site are working with adults who have had the relevant safeguarding checks made on them.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Shireland Collegiate Academy multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Tustian  
**His Majesty's Inspector**