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Victoria Johnston  
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Dear Mrs Johnston

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Chaulden Infants' and Nursery**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 14 and 15 December 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 January 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior leaders, staff, governors and the local authority 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, held meetings with other staff and scrutinised school improvement documentation. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

**Chaulden Infants' and Nursery 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.**

**The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.**

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

Since the previous inspection in January 2022, there has been a change in leadership arrangements in the school. This includes the appointment of yourself as an interim headteacher in the autumn term and two newly elected co-chairs of governors. The new

arrangements in the strategic leadership team are contributing positively to supporting improvement in the provision. Leaders have a secure understanding of the actions required to achieve a good quality of education. They are prioritising areas of provision that will have the greatest immediate impact for pupils and are making sure the changes made are sustainable.

Leaders have united all staff in securing significant improvements in safeguarding practices. Leaders have been self-critical and have not held back from accurately identifying weaknesses in provision. This has informed a detailed and realistic strategy for improvement, set out in their development plans. The emphasis on rapid improvement has been amplified in the autumn term. While this has secured better experiences for pupils, leaders are aware of the need to make the ongoing improvement process realistic and manageable for staff.

Staffing changes have been an additional challenge for leaders. However, leaders have considered creative approaches to limit the negative impact of these. This includes carefully considered use of temporary staff. Leaders have secured a stable teaching staff for January 2023.

Leaders have a clear vision for establishing a broad and ambitious curriculum. They have already set out the progressive content that pupils should learn from the moment they join Nursery. However, there is more work to do to ensure that curriculum plans are detailed and tailored to the needs of pupils. Without this detail, teachers are not able to consistently focus teaching and assessment on the important knowledge pupils need for their future learning. This also leads to variation in the quality of lesson activities and limited impact on what pupils know and remember, including in the early years.

Leaders have prioritised curriculum improvements in the core areas of learning, including phonics and mathematics. In these subjects, teachers have had more time to plan and relevant training to make sure pupils have daily opportunities to build their knowledge.

Pupils learning to read is a priority for all staff. Leaders have implemented a phonics programme that is supporting pupils to learn the important sounds they need to begin to read. Teachers and support staff check pupils' phonic knowledge regularly. This means they can provide extra support and daily reading opportunities for pupils who need more practice. Staff have had training to help pupils learn to read well. As a result, when pupils read to adults in school, they are given helpful support to read books that match their needs. However, there is more work to do to make sure that this support is of consistently high quality.

As is true with the broader curriculum, teachers do not provide sufficiently regular opportunities for pupils to apply their new phonics and mathematics knowledge. This means the knowledge pupils need is not embedded securely in their memory, and therefore it's not easy to recall. Leaders have a clear strategy for the spring term to address this. This includes improving the expertise of staff to design lessons that help pupils remember what they are learning more reliably.

You have made sure that the action plans for school improvement are precise and targeted. These are supporting all staff to know what to prioritise. There are clear and realistic steps for improvement so everyone is clear about the difference being made and knows when changes are successful. This is enabling the governing body to maintain a secure oversight of the impact of what leaders are doing.

Governors are focused on making sure changes are having a positive impact on pupils. They have an accurate understanding of the provision in the school. This includes the range of weaknesses remaining, including those around pupils' behaviour and attendance. Governors' understanding has been better informed by realistic and accurate information from leaders. Governors make effective use of this to challenge leaders and hold them to account for the quality of provision. The professional knowledge of governors is quickly improving but is still at a relatively early stage of development. Governors need to maintain the working practices now in place and continue to develop their skill base and expertise.

Leaders' focus on a lasting and sustainable approach to school improvement is a strength. Despite the challenges of staffing in the autumn term, leaders have devised approaches to ensure that changes made are achieving consistency for pupils. Leaders are taking a measured approach to prioritise certain aspects of provision. They refer to research-informed practice that will make the biggest difference to pupils. Investment in staff knowledge across the school is a secure approach. This is especially true given the remaining uncertainties about future leadership arrangements and academisation.

Staff speak positively about the leadership of the school and the impact of actions taken so far, especially around safeguarding and phonics. Staff have worked tirelessly to make sure pupils' experience is improved. Sometimes this has been overwhelming and at a rate that is not realistic to maintain. Leaders have listened to staff's views and taken action that has reassured everyone. As a result, future action plans also have the well-being needs of staff as a priority.

### **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.**

Following a robust audit of the previously weak practice, leaders have established reliable procedures to safeguard pupils. Systems in place closely follow leaders' policies and statutory guidance. Consequently, pupils are kept safe from the potential risk of harm. Leaders keep detailed records of the checks made on staff to ensure that they are safe to work with pupils.

All staff have had high-quality training and demonstrate a strong understanding of their roles to protect pupils. This includes secure knowledge of local and contextual risks to children and their families.

Pupils receive lessons that help them discuss and gain important knowledge to keep themselves safe. This includes advice on how to stay safe online. Pupils express how

important it is not to talk to strangers on the internet and for your actions to be kind. Pupils say adults are trusted. They know they can talk to any adult in the school if they have any worries or concerns.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have benefited from targeted support from the local authority. This has included a thorough audit of provision in school, which extends beyond the areas identified for improvement in the last inspection report. An action group for the school has provided leaders with access to a wide range of expertise to drive improvement. This has included support for the curriculum, human resources and governance. It is clear from detailed records of visits and governors' minutes that leaders have made increasing use of this professional support. As a result, leaders, including governors, have more ownership of the improvement plans that are now in place.

I am copying this letter to the co-chairs of the governing body, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Kristian Hewitt  
**His Majesty's Inspector**