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1 February 2023

Neil Philpott  
Head of School  
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Dear Mr Philpott

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Set Saxmundham School**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 12 January 2023, 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 January 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, trustees and the chief executive officer of Seckford Education Trust, and other senior leaders, 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 met with subject leaders, visited lessons, scrutinised the work in pupils' books, and spoke with pupils and teachers to evaluate your work to improve the quality of education. I met with safeguarding leaders and checked the single central record. I met with leaders and pupils to evaluate other areas where weaknesses had been identified, particularly regarding the curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE), and the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). I scrutinised a range of school and trust documents, in particular the statement of action and school action plan. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

**Set Saxmundham School 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 school should take further action to:

- Put in place more effective actions to address the low attendance of the minority of pupils, including some pupils with SEND, who are absent from school too often.

### **The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation**

Since the previous inspection, the trust has acted effectively to increase the capacity of leadership to improve the school. There is a new and enhanced leadership team. You were appointed as head of school in April 2022. A new assistant head of school started in September 2022, and a new deputy head of school in January 2023. You have appointed several new subject leaders, and there is a revised structure for middle leadership. You have focused on embedding this new leadership. You know you now need to accelerate improvements to the quality of education. That said, you have worked with the trust to manage change well. You have needed to stabilise staffing. This means that there are a lot of new teachers. However, pupils are positive about these changes. For example, they say they experience far fewer substitute teachers than they used to. This is helping them to develop greater confidence in the school and their future.

Overall, you have put in place the right actions at the right time to improve the weaknesses in provision. In June 2022, the trust submitted a statement of action that was judged not fit for purpose. This was because it did not address some of the weaknesses identified by the inspection. It also had unrealistic criteria to measure the effectiveness of leaders' actions. You have worked with the trust to develop new plans that are now appropriate. You have settled the school, implementing a set of clear and consistently applied processes. Pupils describe the positive difference this has made to their experience of learning and of the school more widely. You and the trust have an accurate view of the school's progress. Leaders and staff know there is a lot more to do.

You have begun to review the curriculum. Leaders are in the early stages of identifying what they want pupils to learn and when. In some areas, this is further along, but it is not established across the school. This means pupils do not yet learn a coherent curriculum that enables them to achieve as well as they should.

You have ensured pupils have a reasonably consistent experience of learning. Teachers know there are some minimum expectations for how they plan lessons. They receive frequent training to help them to deliver the curriculum. For example, leaders make sure that in every lesson, pupils revisit prior learning. This helps pupils to remember what they learn, including pupils with SEND. Teachers have appropriate subject knowledge. They mostly address misconceptions well where they see them. However, not all teachers check pupils' understanding effectively. Until recently, leaders have not had the capacity to monitor and improve this. It does not help teachers that the key knowledge they should assess has not yet been broken down clearly enough. You know that you need to do more to ensure that all teachers check learning well in lessons.

Pupils with SEND receive better support than they did. Leaders have given staff training to improve their knowledge of how to identify pupils' needs accurately. Leaders have clarified and improved the information they give to teachers about potential strategies to help these pupils access the learning. This means that teachers are supporting pupils' needs effectively. However, there is inconsistency in this. Staff need further training in how best to use the information leaders provide. Leaders have not yet put in place an effective process for monitoring how well teachers are helping these pupils.

You have raised expectations of behaviour, both for learning and around the school. As a result, there is much less disruption in lessons. Pupils learn in a calmer and more purposeful environment. They say the school is more of a community. While this is the case, absence is high for a minority of pupils. This includes some pupils with SEND. Attendance overall is lower than at the previous inspection. While the pandemic has had some influence on this, too many pupils are missing too much of their education. You have put in place actions to address this, but these do not yet have the impact that you intend.

You have reviewed the curriculum for personal development. This has remedied the most serious concerns inspectors raised at Ofsted's previous visit. The PSHE curriculum is now compliant with statutory requirements. For example, leaders have identified when pupils will learn about the protected characteristics. You have ensured that staff who teach PSHE have the training they need so that pupils build on their prior learning. However, improvements are recent, and pupils still have gaps in their knowledge. As a result, although pupils remember more of the content of PSHE, such as about fundamental British values, they do not yet have a deep understanding of what they learn.

The school continues to be a safe place for pupils. There are fewer serious incidents as the school has become calmer. Leaders liaise with appropriate agencies about safeguarding concerns. Records show that leaders closely monitor safeguarding cases. Pupils say they feel safe. They have positive relationships with staff. This helps them to voice any concerns they have.

The trust has revised its leadership and governance structures. This has improved the level of support and challenge trustees give to leaders. For instance, trustees meet with pupils regularly, and then question leaders as to why a few pupils' experience of PSHE is still less positive than it should be. Leaders regularly seek the input of outside agencies. An example of this is the police delivering educational sessions in school about knife crime.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Seckford Education Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Charlie Fordham  
**His Majesty's Inspector**