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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Laura Slinn
Executive Headteacher
Cherry Trees School
Giggetty Lane
Wombourne
Wolverhampton
West Midlands
WV5 0AX

Dear Mrs 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 11 May 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 second 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, I discussed with you, the headteacher and multi-academy trust (MAT) representatives the actions taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. I also visited classrooms, held conversations with teachers and teaching assistants and discussions with governors and trustees and reviewed the school's development plans and current curriculum planning documents. I spoke to a representative from the local authority. 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 monitoring inspection, you, supported by the MAT, have enhanced the school's leadership team. There is now a permanent full-time headteacher and two permanent assistant headteachers. You have established clarity around the roles of these leaders regarding the quality of the curriculum and its implementation. This monitoring

inspection focused on how the curriculum is being implemented and the actions leaders have taken to ensure pupils have the necessary skills and knowledge to become confident readers.

You have continued to drive improvements at the school. Your new leadership team has brought additional dynamism and enthusiasm to the school. Your series of rapid action plans has had a positive impact on remediating those weaknesses from the last graded inspection. These plans are precise and highly focused on specific aspects of school improvement, meaning that the whole community knows what they need to do to improve. Parents I spoke to were positive about the developments at the school. They are grateful for the ongoing dialogue about what their child is achieving. Staff are positive about developments at the school and share your commitment to making the necessary changes and improvements for pupils. While work remains to ensure consistency in how pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are met and how the curriculum is implemented and adapted, your actions already demonstrate essential improvements for pupils.

Since the last monitoring inspection, you have focused on how well your ambitious curriculum is being implemented. Recent training in mathematics, signing and sensory integration programmes have been well received by staff. In several classes that I visited during the inspection, there were some strong examples of communication systems being used to ensure pupils' voices are heard and understood. In other classes, pupils were proficient in regulating their emotions and sensory processing needs. However, there remains some variability in how well some staff consider the pupils' receptive and processing skills when presenting them with information. Equally, in some cases, some staff did not act quickly enough to adapt a lesson when it was apparent that the lesson was not getting the best outcomes and pupils were struggling to understand.

Reading now, quite rightly, has a high profile in school. There has been recent training for implementing the school's approach to phonics and reading. You have also identified plans to improve this aspect of the school's work by creating a bespoke programme for developing phonological awareness. Pupils read regularly to their class staff. Teachers also read to pupils to help pupils to develop a love of books. The newly appointed pupil librarians and the new in-school mobile library have further raised the profile of books and reading. However, there remains variability in how well staff use knowledge from training to teach aspects of reading such as decoding and phoneme blending. This limits how successfully pupils learn to blend different sounds to read words and sentences.

Since the last monitoring inspection, early years provision has continued to develop strongly. The environment is well organised and provides focused activities to support learning in the prime areas of the early years foundation stage curriculum. Written plans now carefully consider the SEND of the children and identify how the curriculum should be adapted for them. These plans are particularly well implemented for the most-able children. For those children, staff are quick to move them on to more challenging learning. However, the provision remains variable for other children, particularly those with complex communication needs. In these cases, staff do not always consider how

those children communicate best and how much information they can process without being overburdened by too many words or instructions.

Your 'cultural capital curriculum' has set an expectation for providing a broad range of experiences for pupils to prepare them for life in modern Britain. Pupils continue to experience appropriate trips to places like local airports, shops and horse riding. An impressive range of school clubs provides opportunities for hobbies and interests. However, expectations for what pupils should get from these experiences are unclear. While staff want pupils to get the best outcomes from these experiences, there is no strategic long-term view of how teachers use these experiences to build skills such as healthy lifestyles, protective behaviours, or cultural awareness.

Governors and trustees have continued to develop their understanding and evaluation of the provision at the school. They now precisely understand what has developed well and what needs further development. Their systems for monitoring bring school leaders, governors, trustees and trust officers together into a shared push for improvement. Frequent visits to the school and focused meetings enrich their understanding and, consequently, the challenge and support they offer. Governors are rightly proud of the school's progress but know that work remains to be done before the school is consistently good for all pupils.

Your partnership with the MAT continues to strengthen the school's response to the serious weakness designation. Your drive and tenacity to improve things are mirrored and supported by trust officers committed to the school and its pupils. At the previous monitoring inspection, the MAT shared its plans to invest in the school's leadership capacity. These plans have now been implemented. This has meant that you have been able to return to your executive role across the schools in the MAT. Regular supportive visits from MAT officers have empowered school leaders to be innovative and develop the right provision for pupils. School leaders have been particularly grateful for the MAT's support for staff's well-being.

Since the last monitoring inspection, systems and processes for safeguarding have continued to develop well. The arrangements for safeguarding are now effective. The school policy is precise and bespoke and clarifies safeguarding implications for pupils with complex SEND. Frequent staff training and robust monitoring mean concerns are raised quickly and appropriately. Records are now highly detailed, ensuring clear evidence of partnership with different agencies and swift actions to keep pupils safe. Governors and trustees rightly feel this has been the most robust development since the last graded inspection.

As a school leadership team, you carefully consider how external advisers can best support your work. For example, you have used this support to gain perspective on the developments of the reading scheme and gain external agreement with the school's evaluations. You feel that this work has helped to develop the quality of provision. Governors and trustees believe this support has also confirmed their understanding of the school's current strengths and areas for development.

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