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Stephen Griffiths
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Griffiths

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Ashwood Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 4 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in September 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the interim chief executive officer (CEO) and other representatives of the multi-academy trust, the chair of governors and a representative of Hampshire local authority 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, spoke to a number of pupils and staff and observed pupils' behaviour. I scrutinised school documents, including safeguarding records, and considered the responses to the staff and parent surveys. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

The Ashwood 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 strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last inspection, you and the new senior leadership team have implemented a more rigorous approach to overseeing how the academy operates. There is an increased ambition that many pupils will be given the help they need to move back into mainstream education. You and your team have now supported a significant number of pupils to do so. Together, you, governors and the executive principal have established firm lines of accountability at all levels. Expectations are clearly communicated to all. You have achieved a united ambition among staff to improve the educational experiences of all pupils. Many staff are buoyant and feel well supported under your leadership.

Leaders have developed an overarching curriculum plan for the school. In many of the subjects, leaders have set out the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn. This is less advanced in some subjects, and you are seeking external advisory support to check that the curriculum intent is appropriately ambitious for all. During the visit, you outlined some of the challenges you have had in recruiting some subject-specialist staff. Consequently, some subjects are not being taught, including the humanities. This is limiting how well prepared pupils are to transition back into these subjects in mainstream school. Effective implementation of the curriculum is still in development. Leaders have made clear what the expectations of an 'Ashwood Lesson' would look like. However, these expectations are not yet well embedded by all staff. For example, teachers do not yet systematically check that pupils have a secure understanding of lesson content before moving on.

You have developed a thorough induction process when pupils join the academy. All pupils complete an initial baseline assessment to check prior knowledge. You use this alongside pupil information to swiftly identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) provides training, so staff know how to support pupils to learn. The SENCo has also successfully applied for a number of education, health and care plans for pupils that need them. This ensures that the needs of these pupils are well communicated when they transition back into mainstream school. These baseline assessments also highlight that a number of pupils struggle to read well for their age. Leaders' plans to provide reading support are not yet well developed. While some reading strategies are being trialled, there is a lack of systematic approach. Consequently, pupils who find reading more difficult are not yet getting the help they need to learn to read well.

You have rightly prioritised pupil safeguarding and well-being following the last inspection. Considerable work has gone into ensuring every member of staff understands the signs that pupils may be at risk of harm. Leaders have acted upon the commissioned advice from the local authority to improve safeguarding processes. The trust and governors regularly check that the leaders are compliant with safeguarding processes. Records indicate that leaders take appropriate steps to seek and provide help to pupils that need it. You have introduced a new 'House' system, each with an 'Advocate' leader. This provides pupils with a key person who has oversight of their well-being. An 'Advocate' also supports pupils who do not attend school well. These actions have ensured that staff

are knowledgeable about the welfare of all pupils registered at the academy.

Many pupils recognise that the expectations of their behaviour have increased. They know the academy rules help everyone feel safe to come to school. You have used expertise from the local area to develop clear processes to manage behaviour. Incidences of poor behaviour have declined. However, you acknowledge that the number of suspensions has increased as you work with pupils to meet the higher behaviour expectations. In addition, the way staff implement the new behaviour strategies can be variable. You have provided training to improve consistency. However, pupils still report an unfairness in how sanctions are applied in some lessons.

Poor attendance has been a significant barrier to many pupils achieving well. You and your leaders have taken swift action to begin addressing this. You have communicated expectations around attendance with pupils, parents and referring schools. You have built good relationships with many families to identify and remove barriers to attending school. Attendance is improving, but the number of pupils who do not attend well is still too high. This includes those on a reduced timetable or who have tutoring at home. You are evaluating your actions so far in an effort to improve attendance further.

The school is currently in the process of joining another trust. Consequently, there have been a number of changes in the governance of the school. The capacity of the trust to provide support to the school has decreased. Therefore, trustees have sourced a significant amount of support from the local authority. Leaders act on this advice to sharpen their areas of work and provide an accurate view of the school. You work closely with the executive principal and governors. They check that you and leaders are making progress towards school improvement goals. Collectively, you monitor progress against the detailed school improvement plan. However, plans do not always clearly identify what impact leaders can expect to see. This means leaders cannot always measure how effectively they are implementing change.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the interim CEO of the Catch22 multi-academy trust, the chair of the local governing board, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Lower
His Majesty's Inspector