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13 July 2023

Manny Kelay  
Principal  
Thorns Collegiate Academy  
Stockwell Avenue  
Quarry Bank  
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 13 and 14 June 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 require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in February 2022.

During the inspection, Gwen Onyon, Ofsted Inspector (OI), Sukhbir Farar (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. We also visited lessons, met with staff, spoke to pupils, viewed pupils' work and scrutinised documentation. I have considered all 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 school should take further action to:

- ensure that all pupils are confident that any incidents of discriminatory language will be tackled effectively and that it has no place in the school culture.

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

At the time of the previous monitoring inspection, you had recently appointed several new staff into key positions. You had done this to strengthen the leadership of the school. A period of stability in the leadership of the school has followed. Trustees, local governors, leaders and staff are getting on with the business of improving the school. Staff have welcomed this stability. They can see the school improving and are proud of their role in helping to secure and embed change. Leaders are mindful of staff workload. There have been challenges in recruiting teaching staff. These have slowed the collective drive to improve the quality of education. However, while there remains much to do, everyone is working together with dedication and purpose.

On this inspection, we focused on several specific key aspects of school life. We looked closely at safeguarding, pupils' attendance, behaviour and reading. We also looked at key aspects relating to the quality of education. As part of this, we explored how provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is improving.

Your plan to improve the school continues to evolve. Leaders constantly check the impact of their actions. Several new initiatives that were at an early stage at the time of the previous inspection have now 'taken root'. Leaders of SEND, safeguarding, attendance and behaviour work together effectively. They share information, draw on their collective expertise and provide mutual support and challenge. This is working well.

Leaders' work on reading is one example of rapid and tangible change. Reading now sits at the heart of the school. For example, Year 10 pupils volunteer to read regularly with younger pupils. Teachers read stories to their tutor group routinely. Pupils at the early stages of reading get the help they need. Trained staff deliver this to help pupils build their reading fluency and accuracy. This includes the delivery of a structured phonics programme to support those pupils with gaps in their phonic knowledge.

Leaders have continued to review and improve the subject curriculums. This includes the 'literacy4life' (L4L) curriculum for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. For instance, science leaders have carefully mapped the science content in the L4L curriculum so that it supports pupils' learning in their 'lab-based' science lessons. This helps pupils to see how their learning is connected as part of a wider web of knowledge. Leaders continue to develop teachers' knowledge of each subject and their understanding of how best to teach it. They use wider support from the multi-academy trust to support this improvement. However, this remains a work in progress. Leaders are still working to ensure that all staff, including L4L teachers, know the intricacies and details of what it means for a pupil to make progress in each subject.

Provision for pupils with SEND has improved markedly. Staff see themselves as a teacher of pupils with SEND, rather than it being the remit of the SEND team. This is because leaders identify, plan for, share and review the needs of each pupil. Teachers and support staff have embraced new ideas. For instance, communication logs now help support staff to know what pupils will be learning. Pupils' key workers take the time to get to know

pupils well. This collective approach is being felt by parents. One parent summed this up, saying, 'The inclusion department they now have is superb and I don't know where my daughter would be without it.'

At the time of the previous monitoring inspection, leaders had just introduced a new system for managing pupils' behaviour. The use of this system has helped to improve behaviour in lessons. Leaders use the information from this system to identify any behaviour hotspots. They then act to support staff and pupils. However, there remains a significant minority of pupils who do not behave well. Leaders are working to address this with some success. Nevertheless, in too many cases, this work has not helped this minority of pupils to make the changes they need so that they can learn well and do not disrupt others' learning. Often, leaders remove the same pupils from lessons. This only provides a short-term solution. It does not address the root cause and results in pupils falling behind.

Leaders have put a comprehensive personal development curriculum in place. This is well resourced and they have trained staff so that they can deliver this well. However, the attitudes and behaviour of some pupils outside of lessons are a concern. A number of pupils told inspectors that they hear misogynistic and discriminatory language from a minority of their peers. Some pupils have begun to accept this as part of the wider culture and are resigned to it happening. Pupils explained that staff do try and address incidents, but that often these incidents reoccur at later times. Other pupils worry about the consequences of reporting an incident, so they simply do not tell teachers because they are worried about the implications of doing so. Some pupils described rowdy corridors and overly boisterous behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime. This ranged from being tripped up in corridors to the throwing of plastic bottles.

Pupils are now attending school with greater regularity. Rates of persistent absence have fallen significantly. This is due to the diligence of leaders and staff. Leaders leave no stone unturned in their pursuit to improve pupils' attendance. When pupils attend well, staff celebrate this. When a pupil's attendance slips, staff act quickly and work with the pupil and their family so that issues do not escalate.

In the previous graded inspection, inspectors found that safeguarding was not effective. This is no longer the case. Safeguarding is now effective. Staff are well trained, vigilant and report safeguarding concerns promptly. Leaders follow up reports in a timely way and ensure that pupils get the help they need. At the previous monitoring inspection, leaders did not have sufficient written assurances that vulnerable pupils being educated off site were safe. They have rectified this. Leaders now make all the required checks and monitor pupils' attendance and well-being closely. However, the strategic checks and balances around safeguarding are still not universally robust.

Trustees and local governors are knowledgeable and well informed about the improvements being made. They know where further work is needed. They utilise expertise from within and outside the multi-academy trust to see the impact of the work

being done. This is used to acknowledge the progress being made and to achieve clarity about what needs doing next.

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 Department for Education's regional director 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**