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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Mr Kevin Graham
Interim Headteacher
Leek High School
Springfield Road
Leek
Staffordshire
ST13 6EU

Dear Mr Graham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Leek High School

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

During the inspection, Geoff Renwick, Ofsted Inspector (OI), and I discussed with you, the interim executive headteacher and other senior leaders, the CEO and deputy CEO of the multi-academy trust, trustees, and members of the interim education board (IEB) 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 met staff and reviewed school policies and documents, including safeguarding records and the school's website. We spoke to pupils, visited lessons, looked at pupils' books and considered some curriculum plans. I also considered the views of parents and staff expressed through Ofsted's Parent View survey and the staff survey. I have considered all this evidence in coming to my judgement.

Leek High School 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 progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since my last visit, there have been changes to the leadership structure of the school. The previous interim executive headteacher left the school. The trust board and IEB secured further support from an external partner to second an interim executive headteacher and yourself as interim headteacher. You both started your roles in January 2023. From September 2023, you have been appointed substantive headteacher. This will bring stability to the school.

You rightly decided to prioritise tackling poor behaviour in the school. You accurately identified the main causes of poor behaviour and set about tackling these quickly and effectively. As a result, pupils' behaviour is improving. You put in place an enhanced pastoral team to provide additional support to pupils and staff. This has led to a significant decrease in the number of suspensions. However, staff are not consistently applying the new behaviour processes well enough. Consequently, too often, learning is still disrupted by poor behaviour. Leaders are aware of this and are taking appropriate actions to remedy it.

You have made substantial improvements to pupils' attendance. The attendance strategy and policy have been refined and stress the importance of school attendance. The pastoral team is relentless in insisting that all pupils should be in school every day. Lateness and absence are followed up on the same day. As a result of leaders' actions, pupils' attendance is now close to the national average.

Leaders have not taken sufficient action to improve the quality of education. In many subjects, leaders have not identified the important knowledge that pupils need to learn. As a result of this, the curriculum is not sufficiently well sequenced to ensure that pupils can build their learning over time. In some subjects, the curriculum is not ambitious enough, and pupils are not being challenged to think hard in their lessons. At times, this leads to poor behaviour. Although leaders have been working on how they assess learning, the quality of curriculum planning is stopping this work from progressing sufficiently well.

Leaders have made sure that all teachers have information about the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, teachers have not received the training they need about how to support pupils with SEND in their lessons. Curriculum planning does not show that the needs of pupils with SEND have been sufficiently well considered. Reading tasks in lessons are not matched to pupils' reading abilities. As a result of this, pupils with SEND are not making the progress they should.

Leaders have started to ensure that pupils who struggle to read well receive the help they need. They have identified those pupils who require additional support and have put in place a programme to support them. For some pupils, this has had a positive impact. However, leaders are not systematically addressing the gaps that these pupils have in their phonics knowledge. As such, the weakest readers are not improving.

Since my last visit, the work of the IEB, trust board and school leadership team has become much more streamlined. The interim executive headteacher and IEB reviewed the school action plan to ensure that the school is taking the right actions. The executive headteacher provides detailed and accurate reports of the school's progress to the IEB. The IEB provides exacting challenge and the right support to leaders to make sure that the school continues to improve. A member of the trust board sits as an observer on the IEB, and this has significantly improved communication between the two bodies. As a result of this, actions and decisions can be made swiftly to support the school. The trust and the IEB have an accurate understanding of the school. They acknowledge the improvements made and rightly identify that there is still more to do. They have ensured that the foundations are in place for these improvements to be made.

Leaders and the chair of the IEB took urgent steps after the last monitoring inspection to review and ratify all relevant policies relating to safeguarding. A robust training schedule has been implemented to make sure that all staff fully understand their responsibilities. Staff report any significant concerns they have about pupils. However, some staff do not report low-level concerns, and this stops you from having a clear picture of all the risks that pupils may face.

The trust has secured significant support from an external partner for this academic year. You, the IEB and trust board agree that this support has been vital to the improvements that have been made. We agreed that this support is still very much needed to continue to help the school continue to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Price
His Majesty's Inspector