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Lidia Gardner
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Dear Ms Gardner

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lotus School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 6 July 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 December 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the CEO of the multi-academy trust, trustees, governors and the 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 met with other staff, visited lessons and observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtime. I scrutinised a range of documents, including documents relating to safeguarding, and records of governing body meetings. I reviewed the results of Ofsted's staff survey and the free-text responses to Ofsted Parent View. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

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

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the graded inspection, in December 2022, you have been appointed as interim executive headteacher. You are now spending considerably more time at the school. This has been necessary in the absence of the head of school. A new designated safeguarding leader has been appointed. There have been numerous changes to the local governing body. Several governors have left. New governors have been appointed to strengthen leadership capacity. This includes the appointment of an experienced chair of the governing body.

During this first monitoring inspection, I focused on those aspects of the school that were highlighted as most in need of improvement at the time of the last inspection. This included safeguarding and your work to improve the behaviour of pupils. Additionally, I evaluated some aspects of the curriculum, including the reading curriculum, and the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

In the period since the last inspection, you have taken decisive and well-chosen actions to improve the school. You have been well supported in your endeavours by trust leaders, governors and by the senior leadership team. Together, you display an appropriate sense of urgency in making the necessary improvements. Staff are working well with you to implement these changes. However, you realistically identify that there is still much to do.

Your most pressing issue has been to address the considerable shortcomings in safeguarding. You and the safeguarding team have acted with determination to improve the systems and procedures to keep pupils safe. You have successfully improved the culture of safeguarding across the school. For example, you have strengthened staff's awareness of the wider safeguarding risks that pupils potentially face. Staff now know how to report concerns about a pupil's welfare. If concerns are raised, you ensure that they are followed up swiftly. While safeguarding is now effective, you plan to strengthen safeguarding arrangements further through, for example, using information about safeguarding concerns more strategically to respond to patterns and trends across the school.

You have placed a high priority on improving pupils' behaviour. This was necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils and staff alike. This aspect of your work has been a considerable success. You have improved the physical environment by creating safe and secure spaces. You have also introduced clear routines and increased staff presence around the school building. This is helping to make pupils' movement around school calm and orderly. For example, pupils move from the playground to the refectory in a quiet and disciplined manner. Pupils who have struggled to manage their behaviour in the past now receive more effective support to cope with their emotions. Typically, classrooms are calm and purposeful. Most pupils are well focused and learn without disruption. Staff treat pupils with dignity, and pupils are respectful to adults in return. Incidents of bullying have been reduced. When they do occur, staff deal with incidents quickly. Pupils reported that they feel safe in school.

Improving pupils' safety and behaviour has been a major achievement. It means that you can now turn your full attention to improving the quality of the curriculum. This is to ensure that pupils learn all that they should throughout their time at the school.

You have taken some steps towards improving the quality of education that pupils receive. For example, your work to foster a love of reading means that pupils across the school now read for pleasure more readily. You have made sure that pupils have access to a wide range of appropriate reading materials. These appeal to pupils' diverse interests and are well matched to their reading knowledge. Staff take a genuine interest in pupils' independent reading choices.

Your work to support those pupils who find reading more difficult is less developed. While you have identified a suitable reading programme to help these pupils learn to read, this programme has not yet been introduced, nor have staff developed the necessary expertise to deliver it. This means that some pupils are still not getting the support that they need to improve their reading knowledge sufficiently well. You recognise the importance of investing in this aspect of provision so that all pupils can access the full curriculum.

In other subjects, work is underway to develop the curriculum. You have identified leaders for each curriculum area to drive forward the necessary improvements. These leaders have begun to redesign their subject curriculums. However, it is still early days. There is limited evidence of impact at this point in time.

You have made some improvements to the personal, social and health education curriculum. This includes creating a structured programme to meet the statutory guidance on relationships and sex education. In designing this programme, you have thought carefully about the local context of the school and the specific support that pupils need to feel safe. However, as with other aspects of curriculum improvement, the new programme is in its very early stages of development.

Your work to develop careers education, information, advice and guidance is also ongoing. You have built access to work experience into the curriculum for pupils in Year 10. Some pupils have had some successful placements since January. However, the formal curriculum for careers education, including a programme of visitors from the world of work, is at an embryonic stage.

You have acted to ensure that pupils with SEND receive a better quality of education than they did in the past. For example, the special educational needs coordinator has ensured that staff know and understand how to use pupils' education, health and care plans. Even so, pupils with SEND continue to have a variable experience. This is because leaders have not designed the curriculum to ensure that these pupils learn all that they should.

Trustees and governors have fully accepted the failings identified at the previous inspection. They have an accurate and realistic understanding of the progress that is being made to tackle the weaknesses at the school. Trust leaders have created a

monitoring committee, which includes representatives from the governing body and the local authority. The committee provides clear challenge and support to you and other school leaders. The local governing body is also closely focused on the areas for improvement.

You have welcomed the support that you have received from external partners. This has included visits from the local authority and an external consultant to check safeguarding arrangements. You value being part of the Department for Education's behaviour hub. This external support complements the expertise already being provided by trust leaders.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the Champion Education Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Blackpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Stillings
His Majesty's Inspector