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Angela Sweeten
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sweeten

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Longfield Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 21 September 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 April 2022.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust and those responsible for governance 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 curriculum leaders in mathematics and physical education (PE) to review curriculum plans, visited lessons and spoke to a selection of pupils. I reviewed the school's single central record and met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss safeguarding and behaviour. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to be no longer judged as having serious weaknesses.

Context

The headteacher was appointed shortly after the previous graded inspection. The school, with the support of Swift Academies Multi-Academy Trust, is continuing to recover from a

cyber incident that took place in the last academic year. The school has recently appointed several new curriculum leaders. Some staffing issues remain in some subjects.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Leaders are taking effective action to improve the school. Those responsible for governance monitor the impact of leaders' actions closely. They have a strong understanding of the progress the school has made and the areas that still need to be improved. Leaders have an accurate view of the school. They recognise that more progress has been made in some areas than others.

The school's behaviour policy has become further embedded. It is understood by staff and pupils. Staff apply the 'choices' policy consistently. Overall, standards of pupils' behaviour have improved. During lesson visits, pupils behaved well and demonstrated positive attitudes towards their learning. Leaders closely track behaviour trends and use this information to support pupils at risk of suspension. As such, the number of pupils being suspended from school has continued to fall quickly. The school has strengthened all areas of pastoral care. Leaders have improved systems relating to attendance and safeguarding. The culture of safeguarding is strong. The school ensures that record-keeping is accurate and detailed. Leaders work with external agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils receive the support they need.

The school recognises that there is more work to do to improve the quality of education. Although progress is being made, it has not improved as quickly as some other areas of the school. In some subjects, leaders have reviewed the curriculum and made changes. For example, new curriculums have been introduced in mathematics and PE. However, these are recent improvements, and the impact of these changes are not yet evident in the progress pupils make. Some pupils continue to have gaps in their knowledge due to the weaker quality of education that they have experienced in the past. In addition, there are still subject areas where disruption to staffing is having an impact on the quality of education. Leaders recognise this and have implemented new systems to monitor the curriculum and develop staff expertise.

Pupils' personal development continues to be a focus in the school improvement plan. The pupils I spoke to during the inspection understood the importance of tolerance and respect. Pupils said that bullying is rare and that they know who to speak to if they need help. However, pupils said that the quality of their 'life' lessons is still variable. Some pupils do not have an appropriate understanding of fundamental British values or the protected characteristics.

The members of the local governing body, who were new to role at the time of my previous visit, now have greater experience. They continue to visit the school in their role as link governors and receive detailed reports about school performance. The local governing body works with school and trust leaders to review the impact of the school

improvement plan. Local governors communicate effectively with trustees to ensure that those responsible for governance are well informed about the school's progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Swift Academies Multi-Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Voyce
His Majesty's Inspector