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27 October 2023

Stephen Huntington  
Principal  
Smith's Wood Academy  
Windward Way  
Smith's Wood  
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West Midlands  
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Dear Mr Huntington

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Smith's Wood Academy**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 11 and 12 October 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 March 2023.

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, Rob Hackfath, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the chair of the trust board and the director of education 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 completed activities around visiting lessons, including tutor time and an assembly; visiting the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) intervention room; meeting with a range of trustees, leaders, teachers and pupils; observing behaviour in lessons and social time; and reviewing documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, and staff and parent surveys. 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 requiring special measures.**

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

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

You joined the school as principal in February 2023, a week before the last inspection. Since this inspection, you and your senior team have taken the right actions, in the right order and at the right pace to address the weaknesses identified. You have worked particularly effectively to improve behaviour around school and in lessons, as well as attendance at school and to lessons. Very importantly, you have also focused effectively on improving the quality of the curriculum. You have recruited key staff across the school, and there is increased clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountability, particularly for senior staff. Newly appointed staff share the school's vision and clarity of purpose. This has created additional capacity which is supporting the progress of the school. Staff are very positive about the changes they have seen in the school. They are committed to working as a team to continue to make the improvements needed. They recognise the impact of the clear boundaries that you and the senior team have set for pupils' behaviour and are working hard to use the school's systems consistently. The training you have put in place for staff has been valuable, and they are using this training to good effect.

You have swiftly addressed the concerns around the culture of safeguarding. There are clearer systems to record any concerns that staff have. Your training has been effective in giving clarity and consistency of understanding across school staff on how to keep pupils safe. There is a clearer vigilance in identifying any safeguarding needs. The school has a more robust and rigorous system with how safeguarding concerns are analysed and evaluated. These are used to further inform staff training as well as educate pupils. For example, through tutor time and the personal, social, health and economic education programme. The school is responsive to issues that are relevant to pupils in the school's community.

Internal truancy rates throughout the school have been much reduced. By increasing staffing capacity, you have quickly addressed pupils absenting themselves from lessons and the subsequent issues this causes, such as poor behaviour and impact on learning. Pupils and staff can see these changes and are positive about them. All this has been achieved by leaders and staff working as a team to explicitly teach pupils what is required, to model it to them and to remind them frequently.

Staff are much more consistent in implementing the school's behaviour policy, including modelling their own interactions with pupils and each other. There are now positive relationships between staff and pupils, particularly around expectations of conduct. However, while the new behaviour policy is working well, there is variability in how well some pupils understand the expectations. While many pupils respond well to these expectations there remains a minority of pupils who respond more slowly. Pupils' absence continues to be a significant barrier to their learning. Despite actions being taken by

leaders that have reduced persistent absence rates somewhat, there remains a significant number of pupils who do not attend school regularly.

Following the last inspection, you made changes to some aspects of the structure of curriculum such as changes to Year 7 so that pupils have subject-specific lessons. Pupils responded positively to this. You have also re-introduced subjects that were not previously offered at the time of the last inspection. There has been significant work to develop clarity around the structure of lessons. For example, staff now take the opportunity to help pupils remember and re-engage with previous learning, which helps them to make progress. Pupils also know that they can be called upon to answer questions at any time, which has helped them to improve their focus. This structure gives shape to the learning, and pupils understand precisely what teachers expect from them in all subjects. Pupils are positive about the clear structures and consistency of approach teachers have in their lessons. However, while pupils are positive about these structures, there remains a significant number of pupils who are reluctant to focus on their learning and complete their work. There also remains a small number of pupils who are disengaged with learning. Also, it is not yet fully clear how teachers are adapting the learning to meet the needs of pupils with SEND and also those with weak literacy skills. As a result, these pupils do not appear to be benefiting as much as their peers from the recent changes.

You have carried out some valuable work to improve aspects of assessment, for example creating longer blocks of time for further examination practice which develops pupils' resilience and depth of learning. Staff are using assessments more consistently to take opportunities to check pupils' understanding in lessons. So far, this is more effective in key stage 4. You are aware of this and are continuing to work with teachers, including providing ongoing training and development and quality assurance checking, to ensure the use of assessment is more effective in key stage 3.

You have taken steps to support pupils with low literacy levels. This is at an early stage of development. You have identified pupils who have the lowest levels of literacy and there are clear plans to develop staff expertise in how to enhance the literacy of all pupils. During the monitoring visit, the school appointed a literacy lead who will evaluate and develop systems to support the weakest readers as well as develop wider reading opportunities for pupils in school and at home.

You have clearer systems for accountability and the development of strategies, with many more opportunities built in to evaluate the effectiveness of these. Your quality assurance calendar identifies when and what aspects of school improvement are being evaluated throughout the year. This ensures that all staff know what the school expects from them. Alongside this, all staff now have relevant and timely professional development around teaching and learning in the academic and wider curriculum. The majority of staff report that workload is fully taken into account during the development of policy and practice. As you review your expectations, you continue to engage with staff to explain clearly what further developments are needed.

Trust leaders have increased the capacity of senior and subject leadership through recruitment and direct support from specialists within the trust. The trust is supporting a range of well-thought-out and well-targeted support for the school. This support is evaluative and challenges leaders effectively. The trust is working closely with the school and ensures that there is regular contact with you and your leaders. This is valuable as the trust is able to support you consistently and to commission and direct support for the school when needed. Where trust personnel are working directly with school leaders over a regular period of time, there is more secure capacity to implement required actions quickly. Staff appreciate the way in which the trust staff are working alongside them, helping them to develop their own skills and supporting less experienced members of staff. The trust is committed to continuing to support the school in this way as long as it is needed.

Importantly, you are increasingly developing ways of communicating your expectations to parents. Parents' views of the school are becoming more positive. The responses from parents showed many more were happier with how their child feels in school and your higher expectations of the curriculum, behaviour and attendance. You have introduced a coffee morning for parents to meet and speak to you and your senior team throughout the year. The impact of this is at an early stage but is something you continue to develop.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Fairfax Multi-Academy trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Solihull local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Clarkson  
**His Majesty's Inspector**