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Michael Hutchison
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Dear Dr Hutchison

Special measures monitoring inspection of Emily Wilding Davison School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 8 November 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 January 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, Alison Aitchison, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, 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 with the chair and vice chair of the local governing body and a representative for the local authority. We spoke to some staff and pupils and visited some lessons. I spoke on the telephone with the chief executive officer of the River Tees Multi Academy Trust. We scrutinised a range of documentation and toured the school site. 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.

The school may appoint one early career teacher for key stage 4 before the next monitoring inspection.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last graded inspection, staffing has stabilised. Staff and leaders who were previously temporary have been permanently appointed. This has strengthened the capacity of the school to improve. The school premises is now fit for purpose. Pupils are enjoying making the environment their own. They are rightly proud of their artwork that adorns the corridors. New break-out spaces and sensory rooms have been created for pupils. Together, staff and pupils are helping to make the school a calm and welcoming place. This inspection focused on the progress made by the school to improve safeguarding arrangements, the management of pupils' behaviour and attendance, the provision for pupils' personal development and the way the school uses the information contained in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans.

It is clear to see the progress that the school has made in the areas of focus for this inspection. School improvement planning is comprehensive and appropriately targeted to improve the school in a timely way.

To strengthen the support for pupils, leaders have reviewed and redesigned documentation to help staff understand and use the information contained in pupils' EHC plans. Documents such as pupil passports, education reports and 'planning triangles' have been designed to help staff to plan to meet pupils' needs. These include for pupils' individual curriculum requirements, resources and support. Staff feel more informed about pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders recognise that their next step is to check the effectiveness of these new approaches.

Leaders have thought carefully about the curriculum to support pupils' personal development. There is a well sequenced curriculum for personal, social, health and relationships education (PSHE). The curriculum encompasses the statutory requirements for relationships, sex and health education. Staff also provide bespoke teaching and one-to-one sessions for pupils when needed. These include aspects such as internet safety, smoking and support for mental health. Leaders now have a secure understanding of the school's PSHE curriculum. They know the PSHE content that pupils who attend alternative provisions are taught. The new PSHE curriculum was introduced at the start of this academic year. Leaders have yet to check and evaluate how effectively the curriculum is being implemented.

The school are sensibly prioritising improvements in the management of pupils' behaviour. Positive progress has been made. The approach is driven by the school's core 'RICH-T' values of, respect, integrity, compassion, honesty and trust. Leaders have taken the right steps to help staff to understand the diverse and complex needs of pupils. Staff receive appropriate and ongoing training. They have the right information about individual pupils and know how best to support them. Pupils are positive about the changes that have taken place. They can share their feelings with trusted adults. Pupils are motivated by collecting points in recognition of their good behaviour, attendance and achievements. They enjoy spending the points they earn in the school's tuck shop. Pupils appreciate the support of the

school's therapy dogs to help them to feel calm. They say that staff deal with any incidents of poor behaviour well.

Attendance of pupils remains an ongoing high priority for the school. Leaders are tenacious in their approach. They take prompt action to follow up absence. Staff work hard to build strong relationships with pupils and their families. They help pupils to recognise the value of education. This is beginning to have a positive impact on reducing the persistent absence of some individual pupils. However, leaders are not complacent. They know the importance of maintaining their sharp focus on improving pupils' attendance.

Leaders are absolutely determined to improve the school. Staff are proud to work here. They value the support that leaders provide for their professional development, well-being and workload. Governors fulfil their role well. They understand the aspects that require improvement. They visit the school often to check the progress of improvement work. Governors work collaboratively with the local authority to provide challenge and support for the school.

Safeguarding is effective. Leaders have strengthened the culture of safeguarding. Staff receive appropriate training to help them to safeguard pupils. This includes increasing their awareness of the possible risks to pupils, including from extremism. There are frequent updates for staff, pupils and parents and carers about a range of safeguarding issues. These include risks to pupils locally, nationally and online. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They learn how to stay safe. The revised PSHE curriculum covers relevant topics to prepare pupils for the wider world. Leaders have sought confirmation that safeguarding checks of staff who work at the alternative provisions used by the school have been completed.

The local authority has provided valuable and ongoing support to improve the school. Local authority leaders maintain a close eye on the progress of these improvements through their roles on the school improvement board. Expert advice from external specialists has helped leaders to develop and shape their whole school strategies, such as for behaviour.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Innes-Taylor
His Majesty's Inspector