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Kevin Graham
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Dear Mr Graham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Leek High School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 8 and 9 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in March 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 and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) and deputy CEO of the trust, other staff, trustees, and members of the interim executive 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. I also spoke with subject leaders about the curriculum, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, considered safeguarding, looked at safeguarding, behaviour and attendance records, visited the internal exclusion room, spoke to a range of pupils and considered the views of parents using Ofsted Parent View. 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 am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last visit, you have taken on the substantive role of headteacher and you have established a permanent leadership structure. The interim executive headteacher role is no longer in place; instead, support is provided for the leadership team on a contracted basis until the end of this academic year.

You, trustees, and members of the IEB have a realistic understanding of what the school has achieved and what it still needs to improve. The IEB provides effective support and challenge to the school and the trust board works closely with the IEB. You know that there is more work to do to make sure that all pupils receive an effective education. However, trust leaders have an overly positive view of the performance of the school. This means that you do not always get the support you need to make the rapid progress that you have planned. In particular, support from the trust for improving the quality of education has been too slow to materialise. In addition, there is insufficient support to make sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils at the earliest stages of reading get the help that they need. This is holding back the progress that the school can make.

There have been some improvements in the school. Pupils' attendance is now in line with the national average. All absence is followed up robustly. Pupils and families are aware of the school's expectations and the school makes sure that pupils are given help to attend if needed.

Pupils' behaviour continues to improve. Behaviour systems are carefully and consistently applied by all staff, to good effect. The pastoral team monitors behaviour each lesson and uses this information to provide timely support when it is needed. Pupils know that they are expected to behave well and try hard to meet the school's high expectations of them. As a result, lessons are very rarely disrupted by poor behaviour and social times are calm and respectful. Pupils value the positive impact that this is having on their learning.

You have developed an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Safeguarding leads are knowledgeable and well qualified. They make sure that all staff are trained to be able to spot the risks that pupils may face. Concerns, no matter how small, are reported, and safeguarding leads follow these up rigorously. Pupils take advantage of the confidential online reporting tool that you have recently put in place. You make sure that safeguarding is given the highest priority. Pre-recruitment checks are thorough and diligently recorded.

You took the decision to stabilise and improve behaviour and to improve safeguarding and attendance before further developing the curriculum. Some work has begun in sequencing the curriculum towards clearly defined end-points. However, this work has been slow to be established. The school has not clearly detailed the precise knowledge that pupils need to know and remember in each subject. This means that, in many lessons, pupils are engaged in tasks and activities but not building their learning over time. In some subjects,

leaders have identified component knowledge; however, this is not always translated well into what is taught. As a result, assessment is still weak. When teachers check for understanding they do not always check that all pupils understand the important knowledge they need to build learning over time. Often, assessment is superficial and does not always direct teachers' or pupils' next steps. This means that pupils do not know what or how to improve.

The provision for pupils with SEND has not improved quickly enough. This is because the SEND team is overstretched. The trust has provided some support; however, this support is not frequent enough to have the impact that is needed. As a result, pupils with SEND do not receive the help that they need.

The school has identified pupils who need help to read well, but there is still no systematic plan in place to ensure that these pupils can catch up quickly and read fluently. Pupils with gaps in their phonics knowledge do not have access to a coherent phonics curriculum. As a result, too many pupils do not have the reading skills needed to follow the curriculum to which they are entitled, and so they do not achieve well.

You value the external support that is available to you. You know this is in place for this academic year. You have rightly identified that the school will need continued support to make sure that the ambitions and aspirations of leaders can be realised.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO 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