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Mr Philip Edkins  
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Dear Mr Philip Edkins

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Homewood College**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 6 December 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in December 2021.

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 the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection with you and other senior leaders, a range of staff and governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also spoke about these with an adviser from the local authority and advisers from the multi-academy trust commissioned to provide support. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited all the classes in the school, spoke to pupils, looked at samples of their work and scrutinised school self-evaluations and planning. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

**Homewood College remains inadequate and requires special measures.  
Leaders have made insufficient progress to improve the school.**

**The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.**

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

Since my last visit, the school has continued to face challenges that have prevented the much-needed improvement actions from having the intended impact. There remain staffing issues: many staff are absent, and a growing number are temporary. Already this academic year, there has been extensive turnover of staff.

In October 2023, the Department for Education commissioned a multi-academy trust to provide additional support. As part of this package, a new interim headteacher joined the school in November 2023, and advisers from the trust started to provide support both for strategic planning and with additional staff.

While I intended to focus this visit on the priorities from the previous monitoring visit, namely the aspirations for all pupils, the quality of education, particularly support for their reading, and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, this inspection focused instead on the overall experiences of pupils and staff at the school. This shift was due to initial findings from information shared by the school at notification.

Following my last visit, in July 2023, the school worked extensively on developing the curriculum. They set out the key knowledge that pupils needed to learn in different subjects and looked for ways to help all pupils to become fluent and confident readers. The needs of all pupils in relation to their reading ability are now known. Staff know who needs support with phonics, who needs more practice and who needs to develop their inference skills. Sessions focused on these needs started but have not been maintained. As the term has progressed, leaders' time and effort have been spent supporting staff to manage the classroom environment, particularly when pupils are dysregulated.

Part of the issue has been high staff turnover with many staff leaving. This has unsettled the school community, despite the efforts made to establish strong, trusting relationships with pupils. Additionally, high proportions of staff absence since half term have led to partial school closures for reasons of health and safety. Since October half term, the school has closed for specific groups of pupils for 15 of the possible 22 days. This has hindered efforts to create continuity and consistency. Pupils who benefit from structure and routines have found this particularly difficult.

Pupils' attendance has fallen since my last visit. It remains stubbornly poor. There are currently fewer staff working to address pupils' absence. It is also very difficult to explain to a pupil that school is important and that you have to attend when it has been closed to you due to staff absence. To compound matters, work has not routinely been provided for pupils during these closures. Staff who have sent work home have done so with no expectation that it will be done or that they need to follow it up.

Many staff at the school care deeply about the pupils and know that they can make a positive difference to their lives. However, many have commented to me, either in person or via the confidential staff survey, that they have found the past months challenging due to staffing changes and difficulties. They also raised concerns about the safety of their pupils and colleagues. They note that current challenges have unsettled the whole-school community and that there has been a rise in dysregulated behaviours. As a team, staff work well together and adapt to provide support when others need help. This can be seen in the daily life of the school, and pupils recognise that they are cared for by people who believe in them. The trust has provided whole-staff training to secure a consistent approach to de-escalating challenges and build staff expertise. This appears to have been an empowering session that many staff mentioned as a positive step to help all to change the current situation.

With these challenges, the focus on the curriculum has been overshadowed. The work that has been done is there, ready to be picked up again, but aspirations for pupils are still inconsistent across the school. Staff work well with individuals and pick out elements of learning that will help to hook pupils into a task. Some pupils produce work they are very proud of, and eagerly talked me through their ideas and decisions. However, these are the exception. Many pupils miss lessons, even when they are in school. Many pupils' books have pages of unfinished work. This is not routinely revisited or caught up, suggesting that it was not important learning in the first place.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the current challenges. They have spent time unpicking the issues and have built on the action plans set out following my last visit. They have constructed plans for a 'hard re-set' that will launch in January. These plans appear well considered but there is much to do before then to keep pupils and staff safe, even before the curriculum improvements can be resumed.

The local governing body continues to provide challenge and support at all levels. They remain concerned about finances and continue to seek answers. They meet with staff and actively search out expertise from colleagues. They have also lost numbers and are seeking to recruit additional experience and knowledge.

The multi-academy trust commissioned to help has provided extensive support over the past weeks. From a strategic perspective, they are helping to plan for the re-set and the associated staff training that is required. On a very practical level, they have provided staff to support in school. They model ways of responding to pupils who are dysregulated and need extra help. This expertise is essential in a school with so many inexperienced and unqualified staff.

The local authority continues to provide help with human resources and for governors. They liaise closely with governors and school leaders. They remain in contact with the Department for Education and welcome the commissioning of the multi-academy trust to support school improvement.

As part of my work to consider the safety of pupils, I checked safeguarding processes, including the single central record. Administrative errors in records were corrected by the school during the inspection.

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 Brighton and Hove. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Lucy English  
**His Majesty's Inspector**