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15 January 2024

Louise Campbell  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Campbell

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Walderslade Girls' School**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 13 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in February 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, Sue Keeling, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), James Broadbridge, HMI, and I discussed with you the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We also discussed this with the acting CEO of the trust, trustees, the chair of the local governing board and other senior leaders. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also visited lessons, met with groups of pupils, scrutinised school documents and sought the views of staff and parents. 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**

You started in post as headteacher in May of 2023, having been recently appointed as acting headteacher at the time of the last inspection. Since that inspection, there have been significant changes in leadership at the school, both in terms of new appointments and in restructuring the areas of responsibility that leaders have. This has added much more clarity around leaders' roles and provided greater capacity to improve the school. There has also been a change in the leadership of the trust, with a new acting CEO appointed. This person is also the CEO of another local trust which is now supporting the school. For this monitoring visit, I focused on those areas judged to be inadequate in the previous inspection: quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; and leadership and management (including safeguarding).

The inspection in February 2023 highlighted significant and widespread concerns about the safeguarding of children in the school. The leadership team has acted swiftly to address these concerns and to change the culture of safeguarding. As a result, safeguarding is now effective. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) now has the time to fulfil that role properly and has the support of a highly trained team of deputy DSLs. There is an effective triage system to ensure that when concerns are raised they are acted on promptly and help is secured in a timely way. Staff have received training on recognising the signs that a pupil might be at risk of harm and recording systems have been simplified. However, more work could be done on monitoring the impact of this training and on ensuring that everyone is confident in recording these concerns.

There has also been recognition that there is a close link between attendance and safeguarding, and so the DSL also leads on monitoring and improving attendance. Newly appointed family liaison officers are proving effective at both following up concerns about pupils' safety and helping to improve attendance. Although attendance is still lower than leaders want it to be, there have been significant improvements from last year. This is especially true for the most vulnerable pupils. There has also been a big reduction in internal truancy. Pupils are now almost always in lessons. When they are not, staff follow the school's process consistently well to report any pupils who are missing, and effective systems are in place to follow up on this information. As a result, disruption in the corridors during lessons is very rare.

Disruption and poor behaviour are also much rarer at other times. Improving pupils' behaviour has been prioritised by leaders: violent and aggressive behaviour is not tolerated at all in the school community. As a result, there was a temporary rise in the use of exclusions. These were used appropriately and are now falling as behaviour improves. Pupils, parents and staff have all noticed the change since last year and all report that pupils feel safer. At times, there is still low-level disruption in lessons, which is not yet being tackled consistently well. While most pupils are compliant and follow instructions, they are sometimes slow to settle to their work or do not engage in the work given to them.

There have been some improvements in the curriculum that pupils are taught. There are now curriculum plans for every subject. Where needed, a local multi-academy trust has supported the school in providing curriculum plans that can be used or adapted by heads of subject. However, leaders quickly recognised that there were also weaknesses in the teaching approaches being used in the classroom in many areas of the school. This same trust has supported the school by providing continuing professional development to teachers. This focuses on pedagogy and is based on educational research into effective practice. Over the last few months, leaders have monitored the impact of this training and used this monitoring to target bespoke training. It is possible to see some of the effects of this training in the classroom, and teaching is improving across the school. However, the curriculum that is being taught is not yet ambitious enough and the work that pupils are asked to do is not challenging enough. These issues are recognised by leaders, and this is rightly recognised as the next priority for the school.

Other areas of the quality of education have seen more rapid improvement. At the time of the previous inspection, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were not receiving their statutory support. The school has acted swiftly to remedy this and there is now an effective system to identify needs, with regular reviews of pupils' plans in place. There are also much clearer action plans for pupils with SEND that clearly identify the actions that teachers should take to better support them. However, leaders acknowledge that more work is still needed to ensure that these action plans are used consistently well across the school. Training is in place and there are early signs of it having a positive impact on practice.

There have also been improvements in the support that pupils receive with reading. Reading has been prioritised by the school and there are many more opportunities to read, although the impact of the different initiatives will need evaluating. Pupils' reading ages are assessed and there is intervention for those who need it. However, there is not precise enough diagnosis of the barriers to reading that these pupils face, and therefore the interventions are not targeted enough. Leaders are aware that this is a weakness in their approach, and they already have plans in place to address it. They have made appointments which give them the capacity to act on these plans.

Those responsible for governance, as trustees and as members of the local governing body, have recognised the need for significant improvement at the school. There has been training for governors, and new ways of working which ensure that they have the information that they need to challenge leaders and to hold them to account. Where needed, external support has been sought and used well by leaders in the school. Leaders at all levels have been mindful of workload and well-being when bringing in necessary changes. Staff speak positively about the supportive environment that has been created.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the acting CEO of the Skills for Life Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Medway. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Enser  
**His Majesty's Inspector**