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Rachel Smith
Headteacher
Fir Vale School
Owler Lane
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Dear Mrs Smith,

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Fir Vale School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 25 January 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 took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

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, other senior and middle leaders and governors 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 met with the curriculum leaders for English, science, physical education, art and design and performing arts and I visited lessons. I reviewed the single central record, discussed the culture of safeguarding across the school and analysed your school's attendance information. I have considered all of this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- develop their approach to securing improved levels of attendance across the school.

- ensure that the new curriculum is implemented in line with the plans for school improvement to ensure pupils acquire the knowledge and skills they need.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have re-organised the roles and responsibilities of your senior leadership team to ensure that greater focus is placed on key improvement priorities. The governing body has identified a preferred partner as the school moves from a single-academy trust to a multi-academy trust. As such, the school has made significant changes recently to the curriculum and has accessed a range of external support to aid improvement.

You have prioritised improving the quality of education. Leaders recognise that the published outcomes that pupils achieve are currently weak. Since the previous inspection, you have reviewed your curriculum to ensure that it is broad, balanced and more ambitious. You had started making changes to how the curriculum was organised and delivered. However, recently, you have taken decisive action and decided to implement wholesale changes to the curriculum. This includes adopting a curriculum designed by a multi-academy trust which the school is working closely with. In some subjects, this is still new, but the impact of these changes is already evident. Teachers are clear about the important content that they want pupils to learn. Pupils are starting to know and remember more of this important knowledge. Leaders have put systems in place to closely monitor the introduction of the new curriculum. You are working closely with external agencies to ensure that staff receive the training and development to implement the curriculum effectively.

You recognise that there is still more work to be done to significantly improve attendance. Since the previous inspection, some of this work has been restricted by staff absence and limited capacity in school. Although overall attendance of pupils has increased slightly compared to this time last year, there are more individual pupils who are persistently absent. Since September, you have ensured that attendance has a sharper focus across the school. You have significantly increased the number of home visits, employed an additional attendance officer and a community officer to engage with families. You are starting to see some improvements in attendance for individual pupils and certain pupil groups. However, it remains that some pupils do not attend school often enough. The number of disadvantaged pupils or pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who are persistently absent from school is still too high. You, quite rightly, have identified pupils' attendance as a key improvement area for the school.

You have worked with external agencies to review the school's provision for pupils with SEND. You have ensured that the SEND register is accurate. This means that pupils with additional needs are now being identified more quickly. Teachers are provided with the information they need to support pupils effectively. This is starting to be used by teachers to support pupils in lessons more consistently. This has resulted in pupils making better progress through the curriculum. Incidents of poorer behaviour have also reduced. The

leader of SEND has a strong oversight of provision for pupils with SEND through the school's new quality assurance systems.

Leaders are taking appropriate action to improve the school. They are well supported by those responsible for governance. Governors are clear on the strengths and areas for development across the school. They carefully considered which external partners they wanted to work with to ensure that their vision aligned with the school's ethos. Governors are determined and committed to improving outcomes for pupils at Fir Vale School. They monitor the impact of leaders' actions closely through link governor meetings and visits.

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

Yours sincerely

Stuart Voyce
His Majesty's Inspector