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Michael Hutchison
Headteacher
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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 12 and 13 March 2024, 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 second 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, I discussed with you, the deputy headteacher and other senior and middle 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. I also met with the chair and vice-chair of the local governing body and spoke on the telephone with a school improvement partner for the local authority. I spoke to some staff and pupils, and toured the school with the deputy headteacher. I scrutinised a range of documentation and samples of pupils' work. 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 two early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last monitoring inspection there has been a large intake of new support staff. Several staff are currently taking maternity leave. A new physical education teacher has been appointed to start in April 2024. Two governors have resigned their roles and one new governor has joined the governing body. Further work has been undertaken to develop the school environment. Staff and pupils have worked together to develop classroom spaces that are equipped with the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and interests of pupils in mind. This inspection focused on the progress made by the school to improve the curriculum.

Your school has remained unwavering in its resolve to improve the quality of education for the pupils who attend. Despite the significant staffing changes, your school is taking the right actions to improve the curriculum. I explored how your school is doing so in a measured and sustainable way. Your school understands the need to ensure that the curriculum is built on secure foundations. Your school provides appropriate and carefully structured support to staff to develop their expertise and improve outcomes for pupils.

Since the last graded inspection, your school has reviewed the curriculum. I appreciate how pupils now study a broad range of subjects. Your school has considered carefully what it wants pupils to achieve by the time they leave. Your school has redesigned curriculum planning to better support teaching and learning. In key stage 3, the important knowledge and skills that pupils need to know are clearly identified up to the end of this term. This includes for subjects such as English, mathematics and art. Staff receive suitable training. They have a better understanding of the content and order in which the curriculum should be taught.

Your school has further work to do to map out the curriculum for key stage 3 for the rest of this academic year. I can see how your school is sensibly taking time to review and refine curriculum improvements. Your leaders work collaboratively with staff to make sure that these improvements are right for pupils and support effective teaching and learning. This includes where pupils require a more personalised approach to the curriculum. However, your school's monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the improvements to the curriculum are in the early stages. Your school has not begun work on redesigning the curriculum for some aspects of the key stage 4 curriculum including the 'negotiated' curriculum pathway.

Your school places high priority on identifying and supporting pupils' early reading needs. I understand that many pupils arrive at the school either struggling to read or lacking interest in reading. Your school's phonics programme is now well established. Phonics is taught discretely to pupils when needed. Extra adult support is provided to help pupils to develop their reading skills. The importance of reading is promoted. Pupils are encouraged to read often and for different purposes. Good-quality texts are often linked to topics of learning. Your staff are increasingly creative in their approaches to engaging pupils in reading for pleasure, including the use of audio books and through cross-

curricular project work. However, your school wants to do more to encourage pupils to read and to promote the joy of reading. Your school has suitable plans in place to do this, including the introduction of a new online reading programme and the creation of a reading hub.

Your school has further developed and improved the documentation to help staff to understand how they can support and meet pupils' individual needs effectively. I looked at how the information previously contained in different documents, has now been combined into pupil passports for individual pupils. The passports are linked tightly to pupils' education, health and care plans. Staff now have a better understanding of pupils' needs and how to meet them.

Your school has wisely prioritised the coordination of the curriculum for pupils who attend alternative provisions. Your leaders now maintain strong oversight of what these pupils learn, when and why. They work closely with alternative providers to help pupils to achieve positive outcomes. I was pleased to note that school leaders visit alternative providers often to check on the education, health, safety and welfare of pupils. Alternative providers understand the school's high expectations for what pupils should achieve.

Persistent absence remains an ongoing concern for your school. I acknowledge that leaders continue to work hard to promote the importance of regular attendance. Your leaders stringently follow up absences and try their best to engage school refusers in school life. For example, when possible, your leaders utilise time after the end of the school day to invite some pupils into school when it is quieter. Pupils can get to know staff, take part in personalised activities and relieve some of their anxiety about school.

Your school's governors provide the school with appropriate challenge and support to improve. They ensure that your school's improvement plans are focused and realistic. Staff share leaders' vision for the future of the school. They appreciate that leaders listen to them and treat their views and welfare with high regard. The local authority continues to provide helpful support to improve your school. This includes through the quality assurance of your leaders' work, such as to improve the curriculum.

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