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Dear Mr Hughes

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Holly House Special School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 14 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 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 and other senior leaders, governors, and a representative of the local authority 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 carried out visits to lessons, spoke with staff and pupils and reviewed the school's plans for improvement. I reviewed the school's safeguarding arrangements. 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 become good.

The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that the planned programme of curriculum revision is completed, and effectively implemented in all subjects, so that the school's revised curriculum enables pupils to know and remember more as they progress through the school.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, all former members of the governing body, including the chair, have stepped down from their roles. The newly appointed governors are suitably skilled and experienced. They have undertaken all their required training.

You have ensured that there is a systematic approach to revising and improving the school's curriculum over time. There is a planned programme to review all areas of the curriculum, to ensure that it is ambitious, fully planned and sequenced in all subjects and for both key stages. You initially prioritised the most important key subjects for immediate attention. Those subjects are now well planned and sequenced. Further improvement is being steered at an appropriate pace. This is to ensure that improvements are manageable, sustainable, and considerate of staff workload.

There is now a well-thought-out approach to the teaching of early reading. All pupils are assessed on admission to the school. The outcomes of these assessments are used to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and determine the most appropriate support for reading. A new systematic phonics programme was introduced in January 2024, following a period of research and staff training. All of the resources have been supplied to ensure that the programme is delivered with fidelity. In the small group sessions, pupils engage well because the teaching enables them to draw on prior knowledge and apply what they know to segment and blend words. Staff work effectively as a team to provide skilled support, encouraging the use of pure sounds and accurate terminology. Pupils now receive appropriate support to develop as fluent, confident readers.

At the time of the last inspection, the leadership team was new to the school. Improvements were in the very early stages of implementation. This team is now well established. The impact of actions taken over the past year, steered by that team, provides assurance that the school is improving at pace. When the effective leadership team is considered alongside the renewed governing body, this confirms that there is strong leadership capacity to ensure ongoing and sustained improvement. Staff express a high level of confidence in the leadership of the school. They say that they feel very well supported, and that the professional development provided for them is very strong.

The school has introduced widespread improvements to the way it supports pupils' behaviour. Pupils now have individual behaviour 'smart plans' co-produced by staff and pupils together and updated frequently. This ensures that all adults know and understand each pupil's particular needs and the strategies that work for them. Staff have received in-depth training in behaviour management. This has resulted in raised expectations and a better understanding of how to handle incidents. Pupils are encouraged to have a voice, for example in creating the anti-bullying policy. Leaders report that, from their observations, there is no evidence of behaviour disrupting learning. Incident analysis

shows that occurrences of inappropriate behaviour are carefully reviewed and are diminishing over time. When I visited lessons in all areas of the school, I observed that pupils were engaging well with their learning. No lessons were disrupted by pupils' behaviour. Positive relationships and a calm, productive atmosphere were evident across the school.

Since the last inspection, the school has also completely revised the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum and how it promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. There is now a strong focus on preparing pupils for modern British society. The required parent consultation on relationships and sex education has now taken place. Careers education is now a stronger thread running through this aspect of the school's work. The school is ambitious and aspirational for what pupils can achieve as they prepare for their next steps beyond the school.

The school welcomes, and has benefited from, external support such as from the local authority, the mathematics and English hubs and from a local multi-academy trust.

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 Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Watkins
His Majesty's Inspector