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3 May 2024

Vicky Essex  
Acting headteacher  
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Dear Ms Essex

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Rowhill School**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 16 April 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in October 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, Dave Euridge, Ofsted Inspector (OI), and I discussed with you and other school leaders, members of the management committee and 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. We also met with a range of staff, visited a sample of lessons and looked at documents, including your improvement plans. 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 not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.**

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

Since the inspection, there have been some changes in staffing. The acting headteacher joined in February 2024.

Leaders have acted quickly to evaluate and consider the school's offer to all pupils. Most pupils who were on a 'remote' timetable are now timetabled to learn at the school site. Some are still on a reduced timetable, but there are plans to build up their provision. Leaders recognise that they need to provide these pupils with meaningful activities for the time they are not expected to be at school. Those pupils who do not attend any on-site learning now have a more structured remote learning provision that is more matched to their needs. Most pupils are attending this more frequently and the school is tracking their attendance and progress over time.

Pupils who attend the school itself benefit from warm working relationships with staff. There is a sense of calm around the school and staff listen carefully to pupils. Leaders are introducing a new approach to managing behaviour and staff are developing their skills through a series of training workshops. As part of these workshops, staff have thought about how best to hold productive conversations with pupils. Leaders have really considered how all interactions can help to de-escalate tensions and work out what might be at the core of any dysregulated behaviour. This development work is welcomed by staff. Certainly, we saw it working positively. Pupils know that they are listened to and taken seriously. This is an exciting initiative that is showing early promise. Leaders are in the process of putting this new approach into a policy that will be rolled out in the near future.

Attendance at school has risen in the past term for all groups of pupils. Leaders have taken determined action to build strong relationships with families and this has been successful. The staff team knows its pupils and their families really well. The time and care that the team puts into conversations and support for the whole family help to address barriers to attendance. When pupils are not on site, or do not attend, leaders have strengthened further the process for checking that pupils are safe. This team is forensic in its approach to ensuring that it knows where pupils are. The team works closely with a range of external agencies and keeps pupils' best interests at the heart of its actions. Safeguarding is effective.

However, as much as pupils are happy at the school and many more are attending regularly, too many of them do not attend the lessons they are timetabled for. During our visit, the majority of classes we saw had pupils who were meant to be elsewhere. Some did return to their scheduled classes when asked, but many ignored staff requests, just settling in for a nice chat or walking around the corridors instead. All conversations with pupils are warm and kind, but too often staff do not get the pupils engaging with their learning. Leaders are acutely aware that this needs to be addressed urgently. They have threaded well-considered methods intended to help with this through the new behaviour approach and are also considering the curriculum on offer. They recognise that this lack of

attendance at the right lessons undermines the improved overall attendance figures. If pupils are in school but not in their lessons, they are still not learning what they should.

Leaders have undertaken a complete curriculum review. They have rightly identified that the current offer does not meet the needs of many of their pupils. These needs have changed in recent years. Following the previous inspection, all pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have been systematically identified and all pupils have 'pupil passports' which outline these. Staff all now have access to this information to help them to plan lessons.

Following this curriculum review, leaders are currently creating a more ambitious curriculum with different opportunities for pupils. This has been carefully thought through for key stage 4, using research and expert advice. The curriculum is due to launch in September and is intended to provide different pathways to help pupils engage with learning, find early success and achieve relevant qualifications. Work for the key stage 3 curriculum is not as advanced. With all of this work, leaders recognise that they need to build aspiration for pupils. It is not enough to just give pupils a happy time at school. Leaders need to ensure that pupils are fully prepared for success in adulthood.

The focus on reading is already enriching the offer. Leaders have selected a range of schemes to support pupils who are poor readers or lack confidence when reading. Staff have been trained to use these reading schemes, which are now starting to be rolled out. Once again, more time is needed to see the difference this makes.

Personal development remains a strength of the school. The planned curriculum is comprehensive, and all pupils, whether learning on the school site or remotely, have lessons timetabled. Many of the new interventions that have been introduced are designed to help pupils to understand themselves and how to interact successfully with others. Leaders have shown tenacity with getting the vast majority of pupils to engage with careers discussions and interviews and start planning for their futures.

Leaders are working well as a determined team. They have a very good understanding of what needs to change and are putting in place actions that are likely to help to make the required difference. Recent actions have clear structure and focus. New initiatives carefully set out what impact leaders are aiming to make and how that will be measured. It is intended that the impact of actions will be monitored closely so that they can be tweaked as necessary. Staff are positive about the changes and are working well with leaders. They share leaders' determination to improve the school. Staff have a very strong knowledge of all pupils. Staff's care and concern for each pupil shines through.

Leaders are now starting to move from this concern about individual pupils to think more strategically. The recent work to reduce suspensions is a good example of spotting when a trend is a symptom of a bigger issue that can be successfully addressed. This work has been successful, and suspensions have fallen dramatically over the past term. There are fewer suspensions and fewer repeat suspensions.

The management committee and local authority have continued to support the school well. Members of the management committee visit routinely and ask challenging questions. They have a well-established process that helps to bring together learning about actions that are being taken. Leaders feel supported. The whole team works together effectively and this is helping the journey to improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Lucy English  
**His Majesty's Inspector**