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Dear Mr Huntington

Special measures monitoring inspection of Smith's Wood Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 1 and 2 May 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 March 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, Peter Bassett, Ofsted Inspector (OI), Nicola Walters, OI, and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the chair of the trust board and the director of education 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 completed activities around visiting lessons, including tutor time and an assembly; visiting the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) intervention room; meeting with a range of leaders, teachers and pupils; observing behaviour in lessons and social time; and reviewing documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, and staff and parent surveys. 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 strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last monitoring inspection, you and your senior team have continued to take the right actions, in the right order and at the right pace to address the weaknesses identified. You have worked particularly effectively to improve behaviour around school and in lessons, as well as attendance at school and to lessons. Pupils and staff say there is a noticeable positive improvement in behaviour overall. They also say that more pupils are attending school because they want to learn here.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. You have continued to address the concerns around the culture of safeguarding. This is now having a clear effect on pupils, who say that they feel safe and that they have confidence that staff will act quickly to follow up any concerns they report. As part of your focus on increasing staffing capacity, the safeguarding team has expanded, which enables a rapid response when contacting home if pupils are absent. You know more quickly where pupils are if they do not arrive in school. All staff who spoke to the inspectors spoke confidently, and in detail, about the safeguarding training they continue to receive, including how to identify safeguarding concerns. While there is a 'core' safeguarding team of staff, safeguarding is 'everyone's responsibility' in the school and we have seen the positive impact of what you have achieved. However, you also know that safeguarding never ends. New staff and new pupils are given clear information about who the key personnel are. These key staff are visible around the school every day.

You have continued to recruit key staff across the school, including new members of staff in the SEND department, a new careers leader and a new librarian. For September 2024, you have vacancies to fill in mathematics, science and Spanish. Alongside the successful appointments, there continues to be increased clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountability, particularly for senior staff. Newly appointed staff, including those who met with the inspectors, share the school's vision and clarity of purpose. This has created additional capacity, which is supporting the progress of the school. Building from the last monitoring visit, staff and pupils are very positive about the changes they have seen in the school. The majority of your staff are committed to working as a team to continue to make the improvements needed. As we saw in the last monitoring inspection, staff recognise the impact of the clear boundaries that you and the senior team have set for pupils' behaviour and are working hard to use the school's systems consistently. The training you continue to put in place for staff has been valuable, and they are using this training to good effect.

Since the last monitoring visit, your internal truancy rates throughout the school have been significantly reduced. Through your increased staffing capacity, and visible presence during lessons, you have addressed effectively pupils absenting themselves from lessons and the subsequent issues this causes, such as poor behaviour and impact on learning. The pupils and staff who spoke to the inspectors can see these changes and are positive about them. All this has been achieved by leaders and staff working as a team to teach pupils explicitly what is required, to model it to them and to remind them frequently.

The majority of staff are much more consistent in implementing the school's behaviour policy, including modelling their own interactions with pupils and each other. The number of staff who consistently implement the policy has increased since the last monitoring inspection. There are now an increased number of positive relationships between staff and pupils, particularly around expectations of conduct. However, while the new behaviour policy is working well and pupils report fewer lessons being disrupted, there is still variability in how well some pupils understand these expectations.

While this monitoring inspection has seen improvements in pupils' absence, for a significant number of pupils absence continues to be a significant barrier to their learning. Recent actions have reduced persistent absence rates and you know that this continues to be a key priority over time to reduce persistent absence further.

Following the last monitoring inspection, some subject teachers have left the school and you have recruited new subject teachers in some areas. There remain areas where pupils are taught by your own internal cover teachers to minimise impact on the pupils' learning. You continue to review where you need further subject teaching staff in the short term during the summer term and also for September 2024. There has been continued work to develop the clarity around the structure of lessons. Inspectors met with some subject leaders to discuss curriculum sequencing and the ambition around what pupils learn and how they learn it. These meetings were very positive and showed a clarity of thought behind what the most important information is you want pupils to know. Inspectors saw many staff taking the opportunity to help pupils remember and re-engage with previous learning, which helps them to make progress. Pupils who spoke to inspectors could explain how lessons begin with 'do now activities' and that they are often asked questions about what they remember from the previous lessons. As we saw in the last monitoring inspection, this structure gives shape to the learning, and pupils understand precisely what teachers expect from them in all subjects. However, while pupils are positive about these structures, there remain a significant number of pupils who are reluctant to focus on their learning and complete their work. This is particularly seen in lessons around key stage 3. You know there is more work to do with how pupils in Years 7 to 9 are assessed and around how effective the learning is, compared to more effective learning in key stage 4.

Building from the last monitoring inspection, you have appointed an interim SEND leader. This leader is working rapidly to address the key area of how teachers are adapting the learning to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. They work alongside your literacy leader to further support pupils with weak literacy skills. There is also work at an early stage to

develop and promote reading more widely. Your newly appointed librarian has quickly and effectively appointed pupil librarians and introduced activities into the school, such as the successful 'design a book mark' competition and a Shakespeare-themed challenge.

Further to the last monitoring inspection, you have continued with your valuable work to improve aspects of assessment. For example, you are delivering 'walking talking mocks' with Year 11 pupils to enable further examination practice and develop pupils' resilience and depth of learning. Many staff are using assessments more consistently to take opportunities to check pupils' understanding in lessons. However, this is not consistent across all learning. Inspectors saw that pupils in Years 10 and 11 are learning more of the key skills and knowledge they need and, also, they are remembering more. Pupils said that they want to learn in school and value the teachers who deliver the most effective learning. You are continuing work with teachers, including providing ongoing training and development and quality assurance checking, to ensure the use of assessment is more effective in key stage 3.

Building from the last monitoring inspection, you continue to review and develop clear systems for accountability and the development of strategies, with many more opportunities built in to evaluate the effectiveness of these. You and other leaders know the school very well. You know precisely which areas have progressed the most effectively and which areas still need time to develop. Staff know what the school expects from them. Alongside this, staff can talk about their relevant and timely professional development around teaching and learning in the academic and wider curriculum. As with the last monitoring visit, the vast majority of staff report that workload is fully taken into account during the development of policy and practice. As you review your expectations, you continue to engage with staff to explain clearly what further developments are needed.

Trust leaders have further increased the capacity of senior and subject leadership through recruitment and direct support from specialists within the trust. This includes support in the English and mathematics departments. Where trust personnel are working directly with school leaders over a regular period of time, there is more secure capacity to implement required actions quickly. This support continues to be evaluative and challenges leaders effectively. As seen in the last monitoring visit, the trust is continuing to work closely with the school and ensures that there is regular contact with you and your leaders. Staff who completed the survey and spoke to inspectors all appreciate the way in which the trust staff are working alongside them, helping them to develop their own skills and supporting less-experienced members of staff.

As we discussed in the last monitoring visit, you continue to develop ways of communicating your expectations to parents. Parents' views on the school are becoming more positive over time. The most recent responses from parents show a similar indication that many parents are happier with how their child feels in school and your higher expectations of the curriculum, behaviour and attendance. Your introduction of a coffee morning has brought in parents to listen to your vision for the school and to share their questions and points of view. The impact of this is still at an early stage, but you

continue to develop more ways in which the positive progress you have achieved is seen and shared with parents and the wider community.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Fairfax Multi-Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Solihull. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Clarkson
His Majesty's Inspector