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Nigel Hunt
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Dear Mr Hunt

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ernest Cookson School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 1 and 2 April 2025, 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 June 2024.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's key and (where applicable) provision judgements, 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 leaders, staff, members of the interim executive board (IEB) 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, met with pupils and looked at their work in the lessons I visited. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and during break and lunchtime. 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 no longer be judged as requiring special measures.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection that we complete.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the inspection in June 2024, the acting headteacher left the school. There was a period of instability in leadership until November 2024. A new executive headteacher joined the school at this time. Alongside a newly appointed head of school, this formed the current senior leadership team. In addition to this, all members of the governing body resigned from their posts. The local authority secured an IEB, which is acting as the governing body. The local authority is closely monitoring the school. Collectively, this has stabilised leadership. It means that the school is now on firmer foundations to address the many failings identified at the previous inspection.

The school and IEB have secured external support from a multi-academy trust as part of the school's improvement strategy.

On this first monitoring visit, I concentrated on whether leadership throughout the school has strengthened, as well as pupils' behaviour and attendance. In addition, I evaluated some aspects of the curriculum.

The school and IEB have taken effective actions, in a rational order, to address the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. They have focussed on ensuring that the improvements made are sustainable over time, to ensure that pupils receive an acceptable quality of education. The IEB and leaders are unswerving in their focus to ensure that staff have consistently high expectations of pupils' conduct and what they should learn.

The school is beginning to turn the tide in improving pupils' behaviour. This was rightly the initial, main priority. The school reviewed the policies and procedures for managing pupils' behaviour. It has ensured that staff have a collective understanding about what this means in practice. Overall, staff are now clearer about how to support pupils to manage their behaviour and emotions well. As a result, the number of serious behaviour incidents have reduced. Typically, pupils use the support systems that the school has in place to help them to manage their own behaviour.

In addition, the school and pastoral team are now more proactive and strategic in their approach to checking pupils' behaviour and responding to any trends that they identify. There are early signs that, for many pupils, this new approach is working. Typically, lessons are not interrupted in the way that they were in the past. This means that pupils' learning is less likely to be interrupted, than it was previously. The school is a more welcoming, calmer place where pupils want to be. Leaders and the IEB are keen to ensure that this improving picture becomes part of the ethos moving forward, so that this positive start is maintained over time.

The school's drive to improve pupils' attendance is beginning to bear fruit. There is now a more strategic whole-school approach in understanding the underlying reasons for pupils' long-term absence. This has ensured that the actions the school now takes have more purpose. Actions are tightly focussed on the fundamental issues. The school now works more closely with parents and carers as part of their work to improve attendance. This closer partnership is further ensuring that the school can target its resources and attention in the correct place. From the time of the previous inspection, rates of pupils' absence and particularly persistent absence, have turned a corner, after a long period of showing little or no improvement.

As a result of improving pupils' behaviour and ensuring more regular attendance, the school turned its attention towards the quality of the education which pupils receive. This is where there is still more work to do. The school has ensured that there is a broad curriculum in place. However, currently, the subjects beyond English and mathematics have not received the attention needed to improve. There is still a significant degree of variability in the quality of education which pupils receive. Although the difference in quality between the satellite site and the main site is reducing, the pupils at the main site still experience the greatest variability. Teachers' delivery of the curriculum needs further improvement. At times, teachers do not choose the most effective methods to support pupils to understand curriculum content.

The school has further work to do to ensure that teachers understand the gaps that pupils have in their knowledge. Teachers are also, at times, unsure of the best ways to rectify these gaps. As a result, on occasion, pupils do not understand what they need to learn because the work set for them is too difficult. Conversely, there are occasions where pupils have a firmer understanding of curriculum content, and they could move on to new learning more quickly.

The school has ensured that staff have received training in delivering the phonics curriculum. This is beginning to help staff to support pupils who find reading difficult. That said, the phonics programme needs to be further embedded to ensure that pupils receive the right support to become more confident, fluent readers. Staff sometimes do not model the sounds which letters make correctly. This is in part because staff have varying levels of subject-specific knowledge. In turn, this affects how successfully the scheme is implemented.

The school's work to foster a love of reading is at an earlier stage of development. The school has plans to develop the library in school so books tie more closely with pupils' interests and their age. Although the school has begun to think about how reading is promoted, it is not at the stage where it is having the desired impact on pupils.

Leadership at certain levels within the school has improved. The IEB, executive headteacher and head of school have focussed on ensuring that staff receive the professional development that they need to improve their practice. This is aligned with their accurate understanding of the progress that has been made since the previous inspection. However, they are shouldering a significant burden of responsibility. This is

because other leaders within the school are still developing their specific skills in overseeing their areas of responsibility. As the school continues to improve, it needs to ensure that it does not lose sight of developing leadership across the school further.

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

Yours sincerely

Stuart Perkins
His Majesty's Inspector