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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Mark Ruffett
Headteacher
Courtlands School
Widey Lane
Crownhill
Plymouth
Devon
PL6 5JS

Dear Mr Ruffett

Special measures monitoring inspection of Courtlands School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 15 and 16 July 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in March 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, Victoria Griffin, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you, the head of school, the deputy chief executive officer of the trust (interim), the chair of the board of trustees, the chair and one other member of the interim academy board 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 visited lessons and held discussions with pupils and staff, including members of the senior leadership team and curriculum leaders. We considered all of this in coming to our 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.

HMCI is of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

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

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the previous inspection, the trust has commissioned support for the school from several external partners. The school has also received support brokered by the Department for Education. Support has focused on developing middle leadership, governance and the curriculum. We considered the impact of this work as part of this monitoring visit. In addition, we evaluated leaders' actions to ensure that behaviour support is informed by an incisive evaluation of the experiences of pupils and staff.

Leaders have brought about rapid improvements in the provision for early reading. Many more pupils are successfully learning a phonics curriculum than previously. Their learning is informed by precise assessments of what they know and can do. As such, the curriculum is adapted effectively to meet pupils' needs. A wide range of staff have been trained to teach phonics confidently. Further training is planned to develop the teaching of early writing. The school has developed expertise in supporting pupils to get ready for phonics learning. For example, pupils are actively encouraged to develop their awareness of sounds, as well as the attention and focus required for early reading. Across the school, leaders have raised expectations of what pupils can achieve in reading.

The curriculum to support the development of communication and interaction has been strengthened. Resources to support pupils to communicate their needs and wishes are provided alongside curriculum activities. Staff routinely encourage and demonstrate their use. The school has made effective use of the expertise of speech and language therapists to guide staff interactions with pupils. Staff confidently support pupils to extend what they verbalise and to take risks. As a result, pupils communicate more and get more out of opportunities to learn through social play.

Following a comprehensive assessment process, leaders now hold a full and accurate picture of pupils' needs. In the light of this, the trust has commissioned expert support to help the school to design a broad and ambitious curriculum to meet the range of needs throughout the school. Some aspects of the newly designed curriculum have been implemented, for example, the communication element outlined above. However, leaders intend to implement the curriculum, in full, from September 2025. There are appropriate plans in place to train staff and to support the first stage of implementation in the Autumn Term. This is a significant development in leaders' work towards the removal of special measures.

Leaders have brought about notable improvements to the management and culture of the school. The site is utilised more effectively and there are opportunities for pupils to mix with pupils from other classes. As a result, pupils develop a wider range of trusting relationships with their peers, and with adults working in other parts of the school. This enables them to cope with changes to their routine more successfully, and staff to support

one another to manage any heightened behaviour. Typically, the atmosphere around the school is calm and orderly and there are fewer incidents of poor behaviour or distress.

The trust has taken the right action to bring into the school the necessary expertise to address key weaknesses in the curriculum. In doing so, the trust has ensured that school leaders have sufficient capacity to stabilise the school and establish the conditions for sustained improvement. This has also supported curriculum leaders to develop confident subject and pedagogical knowledge.

The interim academy board (IAB) provides informed governance. Members visit the school regularly to gather first-hand evidence of how the school is progressing. The IAB has a detailed understanding of the school's work to develop the curriculum and improve behaviour. This includes insights into the experiences and views of staff and pupils. There is a greater emphasis on staff well-being. The prevalence of staff injuries is reducing. Where there is a change, or an escalation in pupils' behaviour, leaders adapt the provision and involve external agencies promptly. Staff morale has improved markedly as a result.

The graded inspection in March 2024 identified that physical restraint was used excessively, resulting in injury to pupils. The school has sustained a clear reduction in the use of physical restraint by providing valuable and regular training on de-escalation strategies to staff. Leaders have developed a new system for capturing rich information about pupils' behaviour and how this is managed. This is helping the school to work with pupils, families and staff, to reduce any behaviours of concern. This, combined with the wider improvements outlined earlier in this letter, are enabling the school to provide an increasingly positive environment, in which more pupils can thrive. Nonetheless, leaders' strategic oversight of behaviour is still developing. Their actions are not yet focused on patterns and trends identified across the school. As a result, leaders are not undertaking pre-emptive steps to prevent examples of poor behaviour from spreading.

The Department for Education arranged for the school to receive support from a specialist multi-academy trust. The school has used this support to strengthen the approach to self-evaluation and school improvement planning. Leaders have been able to increase the pace of change and implement improvements successfully as a result of the valuable and practical advice they have received.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Transforming Futures Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Lydia Pride
His Majesty's Inspector