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Dear Mr Francies

Special measures monitoring inspection of The St Leonards Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 10 and 11 September 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 January 2025.

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, Stephen Cattell, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), Sam Johnson (HMI), Ed Mather (HMI) and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the trust leader and the chair of the local governing 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, observed the start of the school day, visited tutor time, observed break and lunchtimes and reviewed parents' and carers' responses, including comments to Ofsted Parent View. We also met members of staff and spoke to groups of pupils. We reviewed the responses to the staff survey, reviewed the school's single central record, scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding and reviewed various documents, including the school's action plan. 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 no longer be judged as requiring special measures.

HMCI strongly recommends that the school does not seek to 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 school has restructured the leadership team to strengthen its capacity and enable leaders to focus on making the necessary improvements. In April 2025, the school appointed a head of academy, an assistant principal and an acting vice principal. Further capacity has also been added with the appointment of six associate assistant principals who took up their posts in September 2025. A new trust leader took up their post in April 2025, following the resignation of the chief executive officer (CEO). However, the trust recognises it does not have the capacity to provide effective internal support for the school. Trustees are working proactively with the Department for Education to transfer the school to a different academy trust. The school has been working closely with leaders from another trust, external to their own trust, and are forming positive working relationships with their leaders. It recognises and values this ongoing external support to secure the long-term improvement required. In the past, the school has found it difficult to recruit and has been reliant on supply staff. However, leaders have been able to ensure that the school is fully staffed for the autumn term 2025.

Work is underway to secure the much-needed improvements in the quality of education. Leaders know that this will take time and that there is much more to do. Curriculum information has been further refined to take account of the adjustments made to the structure of the school day. This ensures that teachers are confidently informed about what leaders intend them to teach pupils and when. The school is now focused on improving how well staff teach the curriculum. Informed by educational research, and with external support, the school has designed an agreed pedagogical approach for delivering the curriculum. It has outlined the lesson structure and teaching strategies that it expects staff to use to support pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding. The school, with the help of external support, is providing ongoing professional development to continue to develop teacher's pedagogical knowledge. Staff are now better equipped to check how well pupils understand the intended curriculum.

In the most effective lessons, staff use their strong subject knowledge to model learning effectively. They explain new vocabulary and concepts clearly and provide pupils with frequent opportunities to recall what they have been taught previously. Staff use the school's chosen assessment strategies to accurately identify misconceptions and key gaps in pupils' knowledge. However, implementation of the curriculum remains inconsistent. Some staff do not have the required expertise to deliver the curriculum effectively. This means some teachers' checks on pupils' learning are still not effective enough. Too often, misconceptions are either missed or go unaddressed. Leaders recognise that staff need further training to help implement the curriculum in the most effective way. Leaders know

the importance of this work in ensuring the best outcomes and subsequent life choices for pupils.

The school is raising the profile of reading. Since the previous inspection, leaders have worked well to improve pupils' enjoyment of reading for pleasure, as well as the teaching of subject-specific vocabulary. The school has put in place appropriate systems to identify any pupils who are at an earlier stage of learning to read. However, strategies to support the weakest readers to become confident and fluent readers are still in the early stages of development. The school needs to prioritise this aspect of their work with earnest.

The school has begun the process of improving the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have changed its provision to ensure that pupils with SEND now work within the classroom environment and alongside their peers. This means that these pupils are now fully included in lessons. Leaders have also worked well to ensure that these pupils' needs are identified accurately. Teachers are given helpful information on how to support pupils with SEND. They receive professional development on the most effective ways of adapting teaching to meet the needs of these pupils. However, this aspect of the school's work is in its infancy, which means that it is too early to measure any tangible impact. Importantly, the school is giving priority to strengthening this provision and intends to maintain a close oversight of this aspect of its work.

The school has rightly prioritised improving pupils' attitudes and behaviour. There has been a focus on improving the culture across the school and creating a pleasant and harmonious environment for all. Staff model warm, respectful relationships in their interactions with pupils. The start of the school day and lesson changeovers are calm and swift because pupils understand the need to arrive at lessons promptly. While the school's revised approach to behaviour is working well, and pupils report fewer lessons being disrupted, there is still too much variability in how well some pupils understand these expectations. Additionally, some pupils are still not committed to their learning and show variable attitudes to their work. This remains an area the school continues to review and embed.

The school acknowledges that the rates of suspension and permanent exclusion are high. The school has introduced a range of additional support strategies to help pupils who find it difficult to meet its expectations. These approaches are beginning to have an impact. For example, the rates of suspensions, including the number of pupils receiving repeat suspensions, have started to decline. The school recognises that these approaches must embed further to continue to reduce suspensions rapidly.

Improving pupils' attendance has had a specific focus with a more systematic approach now in place since the previous inspection. To support this, leaders have increased the capacity of the pastoral team. Consequently, leaders are now more effective in identifying and responding to emerging trends. They are using this information to work with groups of pupils and their families to overcome barriers to regular attendance, paying particular attention to disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. The impact of this work is clear.

Attendance is improving slowly. Fewer pupils are now persistently or severely absent. However, too many pupils still miss school regularly. Leaders are working to further increase attendance for all pupils, especially those who are more vulnerable. Leaders recognise that they need to work in collaboration with external professionals and the local authority to support pupils where help has not been effective in the past.

Not as much improvement is seen yet within the school's provision for pupils' personal development. This is because the school has prioritised other recommendations set out in the previous inspection report. Nevertheless, long-term plans set out the school's ambition to improve this aspect of its work. This includes the recent appointment of a new leader to oversee the provision of pupils' personal development. The school is in the very early stages of implementing its newly structured tutor time programme. It will use this to deliver the key aspects of the personal, social and health education programme. The use of derogatory language remains too common. Pupils told inspectors that they consider it 'banter between friends'. Leaders have begun to address this by training staff on how to address the use of derogatory language, should it occur. Much more work is needed to ensure that pupils understand that this attitude is unacceptable and why.

Safeguarding continues to be effective. Staff responsible for safer recruitment are knowledgeable and skilled. A well-embedded safeguarding culture is evident, with both pupils and staff expressing positive views. Staff, including those new to the school, speak assuredly about the safeguarding training provided, including how to identify potential safeguarding concerns.

You and your wider team are ambitious to improve pupils' experiences of school. Leaders have moved swiftly to take the right actions, in the right order and at the right pace to address the identified weaknesses. Improvement plans are focused on the key aspects of the school's provision and are helping the school to make progress against these priorities. However, at times, leaders focus on the actions taken instead of checking precisely enough how close the school is to meeting their ambitions for all pupils. Furthermore, the school's improvement plans would benefit from a review to identify clearer success criteria to measure the impact of leaders' work. Those responsible for governance are committed to ensuring that the school improves swiftly. They value the external support provided. The work that leaders have carried out over the last year is starting to show impact. However, leaders are fully aware that there is still much more work to do to for the school to come out of a category of concern.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO or equivalent of the University of Brighton Academies trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Louise Walker
His Majesty's Inspector