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Dear Ms Smith

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cotham Gardens Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 23 and 24 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 December 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, Wendy D'Arcy, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you and other leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the interim chair of trustees, the vice chair of the school improvement committee and other staff 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 scrutinised documentation for improvement planning, governance and special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). We also visited lessons, talked with pupils, scrutinised pupils' work and listened to some pupils read to a familiar adult. We considered all 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 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, there have been changes to the wider teaching team. Three temporary teachers have left the school, one new teacher has joined, and several others have returned from periods of leave. Trustees appointed you as permanent headteacher in May 2025. In September 2025, you restructured your leadership team. You now have a deputy headteacher and four middle leaders. This has provided improved leadership capacity to address areas that need development.

The school has started on its journey of improvement. The approach to teaching reading is much stronger. Careful thought has been given to the reading curriculum. The school has selected challenging books for each year group to study. These are based on high-quality texts that extend pupils' vocabulary and help them develop a repertoire of reading skills. Reading lessons engage pupils using strategies such as 'choral' and 'echo' reading. This supports pupils to become confident readers. The school provides effective support for pupils at the early stage of reading. Most pupils master the phonics code by the end of Year 2. However, the school lacks sufficient decodable books for some pupils in lower key stage 2 who need extra reading practice. You are currently working with external experts, such as the local English hub, to improve resourcing.

You have rightly taken a measured approach to the implementation of the curriculum, starting with mathematics first. You and your staff now have an agreed format for the structure of lessons. For example, the 'connect' part of lessons helps pupils to revisit key concepts and consolidate prior learning. Overall, this is beginning to lead to improvements in the quality of teaching. However, you recognise that there are some pockets of variability in how the curriculum is assessed and taught, especially in the wider curriculum subjects. This is because some teaching does not build precisely enough on what pupils already know and can do. As a result, some pupils do not secure knowledge well enough. Leaders plan to develop aspects of the wider curriculum as part of the next phase of improvement.

The trustees commissioned expert support to review the provision for pupils with SEND. There are now effective systems and processes in place for identifying pupils with SEND. Pupils with SEND work more effectively alongside their peers in class. Ongoing staff training has helped sharpen the quality of support given to pupils with SEND. Leaders have a clearer oversight of the provision in place for these pupils. Despite these recent improvements, you recognise that the next step is to develop how leaders review the quality and impact of interventions to ensure that pupils with SEND succeed in building knowledge and understanding well.

You and the wider team have raised expectations for pupils' behaviour. This is now much improved. Overall, staff understand and follow the expectations set out in the behaviour

policy. Classrooms are generally calm and purposeful. Pupils are increasingly showing positive attitudes to learning. Consequently, they can learn with minimal distraction.

Your action plan focuses on the right steps to address the deficiencies identified at the previous inspection. You and other leaders have maintained a strong focus on raising the quality of teaching and learning. You have quickly gained the trust and confidence of most staff. They are united in the school's vision and direction to do the best for all pupils. Despite the many changes, the school manages staff workload well. Staff appreciate that you have introduced change gradually to minimise the potential for overload.

Trustees provide effective governance through the academy trust board committees. They have a strong oversight of the school's plans and actions. Trustees gather first-hand evidence of what is working well and what needs further improvement. Feedback from external reports provides additional layers of scrutiny and assurance. Trustees do not shy away from holding you to account for securing the necessary improvements. For example, they place a high priority on improving the achievement of pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils.

The school benefits from a range of external support. You continue to use the guidance from leaders within other multi-academy trusts to move forward with your school improvement priorities. Your staff welcome the new opportunities training has provided. For example, they particularly value the chance to visit other local schools to see best practice.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the CEO of Cotham Gardens Primary School Ltd, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Dale Burr
His Majesty's Inspector