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6 November 2025

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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 October 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 third 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, Wendy D'Arcy, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you, the head of school, the chief and deputy chief executive officers (CEOs) of the trust, the chair of the board of trustees, the chair and one other member of the interim academy board (IAB), the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We also visited lessons, held discussions with staff and pupils, and reviewed the school's records and plans. 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

Leadership at all levels has remained stable since the last inspection. The school is no longer in receipt of external support to improve. Leaders implemented a newly designed curriculum in September 2025. We considered the implementation and impact of this so far, as well as leaders' ongoing work to improve the wider experiences of pupils, on this inspection.

Leaders have sustained a strong focus on improving early reading provision. Phonics training has been extended to all teaching staff. Effective phonics teaching, informed by regular checks on learning, is in place across the school. Pupils are developing their reading skills as appropriate to their different starting points. Leaders have begun to consider other essential knowledge that pupils need to learn to support their future success. For example, staff take specialist advice to identify the best way to support individual pupils to develop their handwriting where there is a particular need. Weaknesses in pupils' writing across the school, however, are not yet addressed in a systematic way.

The school is at a very early stage in the implementation of an ambitious new curriculum which intends to support pupils' wider learning and personal development. This has been designed to provide opportunities for pupils with communication and interaction needs, and those with social, emotional and mental health needs, to learn and develop skills. The new curriculum has formalised regular opportunities for pupils to learn a body of knowledge in subjects such as art and music. Pupils are finding greater enjoyment in learning a more varied curriculum, and their engagement is stronger as a result. The curriculum is further enriched through outdoor learning experiences, including training for travel and the use of public spaces in the local community. This is supporting pupils to become more independent.

There remains work to do to ensure that the new curriculum is implemented effectively. Sometimes, teaching does not take account of pupils' prior knowledge well enough. As staff try out new approaches, pupils' different learning needs and classroom resources are not always managed as effectively as they could be. This reduces the impact of the curriculum. The approach to assessing pupils' progress through the new curriculum is well considered but in its infancy. Currently, middle leaders do not have sufficient capacity to monitor the implementation and impact of the curriculum and to provide the ongoing support that staff need to ensure its success.

Leaders, including those from the trust, have taken the right action to ensure that pupils can learn a well-planned, interesting curriculum that is matched to their needs. Staff welcome these curriculum developments and the opportunities for professional learning

that this brings. Leaders hold an accurate view of the work that remains to ensure that the curriculum is taught well over time. This is reflected in leaders' self-evaluation and ongoing plans for improvement.

The IAB holds school leaders to account for the quality of teaching and learning effectively. For example, the IAB has visited the school to gather first-hand evidence on the extent to which approaches to assessment are becoming embedded. Leaders understand the pressures felt by staff as they work at pace to implement improvements. At the time of this inspection, leaders were considering how best to protect the workload and well-being of staff as they make further necessary changes to policy and practices in the school.

At the last monitoring inspection, we identified that leaders had achieved a clear reduction in the use of physical restraint since the graded inspection in March 2024, in which safeguarding was not effective. Leaders have sustained their focus on minimising incidents through de-escalation. The use of physical restraint is no longer typical. Leaders analyse any incidents carefully and ensure that staff put their training into practice effectively. This change of culture is significant in the school's work towards the removal of special measures.

Leaders have strengthened their strategic use of pupils' behaviour records to address patterns and trends arising across the school. They have developed a system for reviewing the behaviour of individual pupils who present concerns. At times, however, there is a lack of coherence and clarity in the way that support is planned and risks are assessed for individual pupils. This sometimes means that periods of heightened behaviour go on for longer than they should. Although the school typically provides a calm environment, some routines require more careful consideration to ensure a settled atmosphere throughout the school day for everyone.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, 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