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Dear Mrs James

Special measures monitoring inspection of Birchensale Middle School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 9 and 10 July 2024, 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 September 2023.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, 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, Chris Stevens, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, deputy chief executive officer, governors, trustees 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. I also visited lessons, met subject leaders and other staff and spoke with pupils in lessons, at breaktime or lunchtime and in meetings. I held meetings and scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding. A parent survey and staff survey were also completed. 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 be no longer judged as requiring special measures.

I am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last inspection, you have moved swiftly to take the right actions, in the right order at the right pace to address the identified weaknesses. You have ensured that there is capacity in your leadership team to enable you to focus on the necessary improvements in the school. Pupils and staff report that they have seen the improvements in the school.

With the trust's support, you secured an operations manager on secondment and have recently made a permanent appointment to this position. This has given your senior leadership team the capacity to lead and focus on their areas of responsibility. You have refined job descriptions at a number of levels to ensure that staff are clear on their roles and responsibilities. You have also brought in a member of staff with specific key stage 2 expertise to lead on the oversight of this phase of the school. Finally, you have restructured subject leadership in line with your clear vision for the quality of education. Leaders speak positively about these changes as they have given clarity to their roles, and have meant there is coherence across your team and clarity around areas of responsibility. Staff also reflected positively on this increased clarity around roles, as well as the improvements which have taken place since inspection.

You have acted swiftly to improve the school's work around safeguarding. There is clearer oversight of safeguarding cases and more robust and rigorous systems in place to ensure there is absolute clarity around the processes for safeguarding through the school, including staff recruitment. This means that staff at all levels have appropriate understanding of their roles in ensuring that pupils are kept safe, and who has specific responsibility for this. In this work, the trust has supported leaders in the school, providing oversight and coherence between your school and others in the trust.

Following the previous inspection, you reviewed the structure of the curriculum and rebalanced the time that pupils spend on each subject. There is now more dedicated time for reading in key stage 3, alongside the study of English. You have worked with subject leaders to refine and consolidate the key learning that pupils will know and remember in each subject. As part of this, you have worked with other schools, some of which are in the trust, to ensure that there is coherence in pupils' learning before they come to the school, and after they leave. This also applies to work you have undertaken with the schools in the trust to ensure there is standardised approaches to formal assessment points across the year. This work has all had a positive impact, and you are now focusing on consolidating this redesigned curriculum across all subjects.

You have given considerable attention to how staff teach the agreed curriculum. This includes having more emphasis on explicit instruction, how teachers link new learning to previous learning, the sequence of activities and how teachers check for understanding. You recognise that there is more to do to embed this consistently across the school, and to ensure that teachers and subject leaders are trained to take responsibility for pupils' learning. You have taken sensible steps to review how you assess pupils' understanding of the key learning. Again, this is being embedded across the school and you recognise that

there remain inconsistencies in classroom practice. There is ongoing training in place to address this.

You correctly identified that weaknesses in the school's support for pupils' reading were a barrier to their success across the curriculum. Therefore, you have prioritised significant steps to improve reading. You are providing support to pupils in the early stages of reading and to those who need help understanding what they read. These efforts are having a positive impact. You have implemented effective methods to assess pupils' reading abilities. As a result, you have accurately identified pupils who require assistance in learning to read and others who need help in understanding what they read. These pupils now receive appropriate support from well-trained adults. Additionally, the school is actively promoting reading across all subjects. Teachers are increasingly encouraging and expecting pupils to read within their respective subjects. This initiative aligns with your efforts to intentionally broaden pupils' cultural knowledge.

You have conducted an initial review of the school's support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). You have used the findings from this review to identify several key priorities and have taken effective steps to address them. As a result, staff members have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities in regard to SEND and are improving their ability to support pupils with specific needs. Additionally, you have implemented a wider range of appropriate assessments, which is helping to identify pupils' needs more accurately, including in reading and numeracy. You are working to ensure that the information provided to teachers and teaching assistants is used consistently well to support pupils with SEND in their learning.

You have reviewed the school's approach to behaviour management and introduced a new policy and clearer allocation of roles and responsibilities at all levels. This has ensured that everyone in the school is clear about their role to enable them to implement the agreed approach. Leaders can now be strategic in their approach to monitoring behaviour and respond to trends they have identified. You have trained staff on your approaches to consistently uphold your school policy, with specific work on consistency of response and de-escalation. These approaches are beginning to have impact, although you recognise there remain inconsistent approaches to the management of off-task learning behaviour. Even though suspensions have increased, you have a very clear overview of behaviour incidents, and the support in place for pupils to enable them to meet your expectations. You are aware that some more vulnerable pupils are more likely to be suspended, and you are working to ensure these pupils have the support they need to prevent this happening.

Attendance has had a specific focus with a more systematic approach now in place since the previous inspection. To support this approach you have made two key appointments to the attendance team. All this means that the importance of regular attendance is addressed at all levels of the school from tutors through to the senior leadership team. The graduated approach has already improved attendance at all levels, including those pupils who are persistently absent. You are working to further increase attendance for all pupils, especially those who are more vulnerable.

The trust and those who are responsible for governance have been instrumental in their swift action to support your work to improve the school. They created a rapid improvement board to support and robustly evaluate the school's progress towards making the necessary improvements. The trust has strengthened the local governing body with new appointments, who have specific expertise that benefits the school. The trust deputy CEO is acting as chair of the local governors. This body offers support and challenge alongside the trust board. The trust and governors have brokered a number of external reviews to evaluate the improvements made by leaders. These have been incisive and have supported the improvements made and identified precise next steps. Governors and the trust have worked to synthesise their oversight with a clear eye on workload for you and your senior team. Staff too appreciate the efforts that are being made with workload and how they can consult you and your senior team.

You are working to deepen relationships with the parent body. This has involved a range of opportunities, from invitations to your sports day at a local stadium, to achievement assemblies and coffee mornings. The school too have led work in the local community with litter-picking and work in a retirement home. You have established a parent teacher association and are planning further events in the new year. You have taken care to explain the rationale behind your actions to parents, and how you are working to improve standards. You recognise some aspects of this work are at an earlier stage of development, but are pleased with the feedback you have had from parents to date.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Bordesley Multi-Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Madden
His Majesty's Inspector