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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 11 and 12 December 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 second 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 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, Sukhbir Farrar, Ofsted Inspector (OI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the deputy chief executive officer, other staff, trustees and governors 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, met subject leaders and other staff. We spoke with pupils in lessons, at breaktime or lunchtime and in meetings. We held meetings and scrutinised documents relating to leaders' work to improve the school. A parent survey and staff survey were also completed and results analysed by the inspectors. 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 is 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 continue to improve provision and address the identified weaknesses. You are clear about where there is more secure practice, and where there remain improvements to be made. Feedback from pupils, staff and increasing numbers of parents testifies to the steps forward which the school has taken. You continue to add capacity to the leadership team in the school, with the appointment of a new operations manager, an additional phase lead and increased capacity in the pastoral team. These appointments are enabling the leadership team to focus on the key areas for improvement for the school. Additional specialist teaching staff have been recruited to start in January 2025.

There are secured improvements in the quality of education that the pupils receive, with increased consistency around presentation, handwriting and more extended writing. Pupils show more pride in the amount and quality of work that is being produced across a range of subjects. Other improvements in the quality of education are more consistent in key stage 2, where the primary model is now more secure. This is because there is a better selection of activity to build on pupils' prior learning, and more effective checking for understanding. These improvements are inconsistent, however, especially for classes in key stage 3.

Reading remains a significant priority. The developments that you have introduced are having impact, both for the weakest readers and a wider culture of reading. There remains, however, some inconsistencies of approach in key stage 3 in the identification of key learning, selection of task and checking for understanding.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) remains a significant weakness. These weaknesses remain because too often these pupils' needs are not clearly identified, the information provided to teachers generally lacks precision, and adaptations to the curriculum are not precise enough. Also, additional adults are sometimes unclear on their roles. All this means that pupils with SEND do not achieve well. You have staffing support from the trust and are taking the immediate and urgent actions necessary to improve the provision for these pupils.

Governors and trustees have an accurate view of the school and the actions taken to secure improvements. They are aware that the published key stage 2 results show some improvements but do not fully reflect the journey the school has been on. Staff state there is appropriate engagement around workload and they appreciate the training opportunities they have had.

You continue to analyse pupils' attendance rigorously. This means that you can respond rapidly to emerging trends and the school's headline attendance shows significant improvement as a result. The links you have established with families mean that attendance has increased for all groups of pupils. You have clear identification of where further improvements can be made for some more vulnerable pupils. You continue to

ensure that the school's behaviour expectations are clearly explained to all pupils. However, there is greater clarity around these among staff and pupils in key stage 2 than in key stage 3. There has been a recent increase in the number of suspensions linked to your focus on higher expectations. You have oversight of the pupils who find it harder to meet your expectations. With greater analysis of the trends for behaviour, you intend your actions to support pupils will have more impact.

The school's work for pupils' personal development includes the curricular provision as well as a number of extra-curricular opportunities, leadership activities and some work with outside agencies. The curricular provision is delivered by specialists in key stage 3 and class teachers in key stage 2. Although leaders provide high-quality materials for the provision of pupils' personal development, they are less clear how effectively these are being used. The school monitors the uptake of extra-curricular opportunities and leaders are working to review provision to ensure it is all high quality and meets the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND.

Safeguarding remains effective. With the support from the trust, the processes you have established mean you have clear oversight of all pupils, including the most vulnerable pupils. Your increased engagement with the families of more vulnerable pupils means that you have been able to secure increased support for them from the local authority in a number of cases.

You have secured an external review for quality of education, and an internal review from the trust of reading. These have helped to verify that the changes you have introduced are having impact as you intend. You recognise that leaders in the school need further development to ensure that they can evaluate the quality of the provision in their areas of responsibility. You have also identified support from the trust for non-specialist teachers as a priority.

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