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Mrs Paula Hegarty
Headteacher
Excelsior Academy
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Dear Mrs Hegarty

Monitoring inspection of a school not in a category of concern of Excelsior Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 8 May 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 took place because the school meets the monitoring threshold as set out in the [Monitoring Inspection Handbook](#).

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, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the chair of trustees and chair of the local governing body, 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 spoke with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, met with pupils and reviewed a sample of documentation. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but some aspects of the school need further improvement.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you and several other staff have been appointed. These appointments have helped to secure improvements to the school. The school recognises there is more to be done to embed the changes that have taken place so far. The focus of this first monitoring visit was to review the progress made since the last inspection.

The school has refined the curriculum in several subjects. This work has included reviewing what pupils learn and in what order. The school has developed an effective curriculum with coherent planning and sequencing, for example in English and Art. However, improvements in how well the curriculum is implemented are not fully embedded. The school continues to evaluate which approaches are most effective. Staff now ask specific questions of pupils to check their understanding. There are regular opportunities for pupils to re-visit what they have previously learned. Staff are increasingly taking time to embed new knowledge for pupils before moving learning on. This helps pupils to remember more of what they have been taught over time. As a result, pupils are benefiting from increasingly well-matched learning in a range of subjects.

Professional development to support the teaching of mathematics is bearing fruit. Staff are trained to use consistent methods and vocabulary in lessons to support younger pupils' understanding. Curriculum leaders have accurately identified the topics and skills pupils find hardest to master. They have adapted the curriculum to address misconceptions or gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge. Pupils have begun to achieve more positively in mathematics over time. However, the school recognises that improvements need to be further accelerated to meet the school's high ambitions for pupils' achievement and help prepare pupils well for their next steps in education, employment or training.

The school's work to improve the attendance of pupils has led to a significant reduction in rates of persistent absence, particularly among older pupils. Disadvantaged pupils now attend more regularly. This success is due to the strategic and tenacious approach of staff. The school commits considerable resources and time to improving pupils' attendance. It recognises that to succeed, pupils must be in school. Increased rates of attendance are also improving pupil well-being because staff have more opportunities to support pupils who used to attend less often.

The school has used the support from the trust wisely to target the areas that need most improvement, for example through work with subject leaders and providing appropriate training and curriculum development expertise. Staff feel well supported and value the training they receive. Staff well-being is a high priority at the school. Initiatives such as 'Wellbeing Wednesday' promote positive mental health. The school recognises the importance of nurturing staff and supporting their professional development.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the Laidlaw Schools Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

John Linkins
His Majesty's Inspector