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Stephen Brownlow
Executive Principal
Gospel Oak School
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Dear Mr Brownlow,

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Gospel Oak

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 2 July 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 have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in October 2022.

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, Rob Hackfath, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, trustees, governors and external consultants, the actions that you have taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also reviewed safeguarding records, spoke to staff and pupils, observed pupils' behaviour, and scrutinised a range of action-planning documentation. 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 having serious weaknesses.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

Since the previous monitoring inspection in 2024, the school's leadership and staffing have been more stable than in the past. The school has appointed two new vice-principals to the leadership team. Changes to the school's leadership structure after the last monitoring inspection in March 2024, have resulted in a more coherent team with roles relevant to support the school's priorities to improve attendance, pastoral support and safeguarding. There is a palpable sense of teamwork and shared responsibility alongside clarity of responsibilities. There are currently no gaps in staffing in the school.

Since the previous monitoring inspection in March 2024, the trust have further strengthened their oversight of the school. This includes the use of external support so that they have an additional independent view of how the school is improving. As a result, the trust and those responsible for governance have a clear and detailed view of how the school is improving.

During this monitoring visit, the focus was on the school's actions to improve pupils' behaviour, the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and leadership. I checked that the arrangements for safeguarding remained effective. At the time of this visit, most pupils and staff were not on the school site.

The school's work to improve the curriculum is starting to have impact. This work has included training for middle leaders so that they can improve their subject and evaluate the quality of teaching accurately. Now, teachers are more aware of the ambitious end points in the curriculum and the knowledge pupils need. To complement this, the school has introduced lesson expectations for teachers. These expectations ensure that pupils have opportunity to review and embed the knowledge they have learned so that they remember more of the curriculum.

The school's work to improve adaptive teaching is in development. This is having a positive impact. However, there is more to do to ensure that all pupils, especially those who have fallen behind, get the precise support they need in lessons to secure excellent attainment. Leaders know this and the strategic plans they have in place contain the right actions to be undertaken at the right time.

The impact of the new phonics programme is starting to gain momentum. Due to ongoing training, staff are more confident in their delivery. However, it has taken longer than it should for the programme to have impact. This is due to a delay in its launch. In the autumn term this year, the school will begin to support Year 7 pupils much earlier in the academic year so that they are better placed to read well and make better progress across their subjects.

The school has taken effective action to make behaviour expectations clear to everyone. Staff implement the behaviour policy consistently across the school. They use data about behaviour to monitor trends and patterns. As a result, behaviour incidents have reduced.

This includes a notable reduction in the rate of suspensions. Pupils who may have had multiple suspensions in the past no longer do so. This is also the case for pupils with SEND and those who are vulnerable. Pupils and staff agree that behaviour is improving. Pupils feel safe on site. There have been sustained reductions in issues that were prevalent in the past such as fights, truancy, lateness and lesson disruption.

Leaders demonstrate a deep understanding of the factors to encourage improved attendance, for example the impact of behaviour and literacy levels. They collect data regularly and analyse it forensically. This supports the school to evaluate strategies and plan next steps. As a result, attendance has improved and is near to national comparators. Leaders have sustained these improvements over the academic year.

The school has a clear and strategic approach to upskilling staff around safeguarding. There are clear lines of accountability. The school invites external scrutiny of safeguarding and responds positively to all the challenge and support given. The relevant checks on staff who have been recruited since the last monitoring inspection are completed and there are clear and comprehensive processes to check and audit recruitment procedures.

The school takes a clear and age-appropriate approach to teaching pupils about how to keep themselves safe. Where specific issues are noted, they respond by reviewing the curriculum for safeguarding, running assemblies and then monitoring the impact of their actions. This has had a positive impact and resulted in a decrease in the number of reported incidents of prejudicial behaviour. Pupil voice activities track pupils' perceptions and experiences and pupils are confident in leaders that their concerns will be taken seriously. Ongoing development for staff has enabled their confidence to identify and respond and report any issues regarding pupils' safety. This includes issues of sexualised language or behaviour.

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

Yours sincerely

Dan Owen
His Majesty's Inspector