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Ms Nichola Smith
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Dear Ms Smith

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Melbourn Village College

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 17 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 have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in July 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, I discussed with you, the chief executive officer (CEO) of The CAM Academy Trust, the director of strategy and improvement and the director for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) from the trust, the chair of the local advisory board, other senior leaders and 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 met with pupils, visited lessons, checked school improvement documentation and reviewed the school's system for safeguarding. I considered responses to Ofsted Parent View alongside the Ofsted survey for pupils. In addition, I took into account two emails from parents. 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 having serious weaknesses.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the last monitoring visit, The CAM Academy Trust has altered how it holds the school to account. It has replaced the improvement board with a standards board, which monitors the school's action plan on a fortnightly basis. The trust has appointed a new director of strategy and improvement, who oversees the delivery of the action plan. The trust has made the strategic decision to alter the leadership model for the school. To this end, they have appointed a full-time principal who starts the position in January 2025. The executive headteacher left at the end of October. In the interim, the head of school has undertaken the role of acting principal. The trust continues to deploy trust staff to work in the school to support senior leadership. This includes the trust director for SEND and a deputy principal from another school.

During this monitoring visit, the focus was on the school's actions to improve pupils' behaviour and leadership. I checked that the arrangements for safeguarding remained effective and whether the school has sustained the improvements seen at the last monitoring visit. This included the provision for SEND. At the time of this visit, all year groups were attending on site.

Leaders have sustained the focus upon improving the delivery of the curriculum so that it meets the needs of pupils. Staff receive ongoing training, which provides guidance on how to adjust the curriculum. This includes how to improve support for pupils with SEND in lessons. Collaboration between the Cabin, the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND, and the main school is stronger. Specialist staff from the Cabin share their expertise. The school continues to run appropriate support for pupils who are learning to read.

There is greater rigour with the school's quality assurance procedures. Senior leaders are clear as to what they expect to see in lessons and check that their 'non-negotiables' are in place. These expectations link to the key improvement priorities for the school. There is now a senior leader who is responsible for raising achievement in Year 11. Pupils receive targeted interventions to improve English and mathematics outcomes, their attendance and their behaviour. While this strategy is in its infancy, it is having an impact. There is a reduction in the number of suspensions that Year 11 pupils receive.

The site remains calm. Staff continue to implement the safer corridors strategy. Movement around the school is well managed. Most pupils follow the expectation that they will not use offensive language. Pupils report that behaviour in most lessons is better. They are not experiencing the amount of low-level disruption they had previously. However, there remains concerns from pupils and staff about a minority of pupils who demonstrate more high-risk behaviours. There is still a disregard and a flouting of the rules by this group of pupils. While the school has worked on a behaviour curriculum which emphasises the teaching of kindness and respect, it is not yet having the impact it should.

Consequences for behaviour are inconsistently applied. This is particularly the case for suspensions. Pupils can receive the same punishment for more minor infringements as for physical aggression. Therefore, pupils do not see a fair application of the system. Some pupils who have suspensions do not understand why. Nor do they see how they can be supported to alter their behaviours. When told they will be in receipt of behaviour support plans, pupils do not always receive them. There is confusion about when a pupil warrants reasonable adjustment with the behaviour policy due to their needs. That said, the rate of suspensions is falling, and attendance is improving.

Leaders are using data more effectively to inform their decision-making. Staff are following the directive to reward pupils more often. This is part of the strategy to create a more positive culture in the school. The trust is clear as to the milestones that leaders must reach, providing structured schedules for leadership to follow. These schedules link to the school's action plan, which continues to be robust with appropriate actions to drive school improvement.

Safeguarding arrangements remain effective. Pupils continue to have the confidence that staff will deal with their concerns as they arise. The school has acted on the advice and guidance from the local authority in its recent safeguarding audit. Staff receive frequent safeguarding updates, which provide timely reminders of the risks in the local and wider community. New staff in the setting have received appropriate training. They understand the school's safeguarding policy and systems. Staff are up to date in their knowledge of the latest government guidance.

Staff and pupils are united in their goal to make the school a better place to be. This ambition has not changed since the last monitoring visit. However, some staff and pupils are unsettled by the leadership changes. This, along with issues with parts of the school building and some staff absence, has dented the morale of some staff. Staff are working hard to make change happen. The trust continues to provide support for staff's well-being, including supervision. The trust has made a concerted effort to keep parents informed of progress and provide avenues for their voice to be heard. However, parents still see that issues with behaviour remain and want this addressed. While progress has recently slowed, the trust has readily identified this and has increased support for the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Smith
His Majesty's Inspector