

The Promise School

Wardhayes, Simmons Way, Okehampton, EX20 1PU

Unique reference number (URN): 149041

Monitoring inspection report: 18 March 2026

At the most recent graded inspection, the following areas were identified as needing to improve:

The school's expectations for pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are low. This is exacerbated further by the school's lack of a consistent approach in how to challenge and respond to pupils' poor behaviour. The result is a school culture where pupils demonstrate a lack of respect to others, learning is regularly disrupted and the use of derogatory language is commonplace. The school must increase its expectations so that pupils have clear boundaries to encourage positive behaviour and attitudes to learning. Staff must be supported in their understanding of these increased expectations so that they have the confidence and skills to adhere to them.

The school has not ensured that its staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, pupils do not get the precise, targeted support that they need to learn and develop successfully. Too often, this lack of SEND expertise increases pupils' barriers to learning so that they show their frustrations in their behaviour and attitudes. The trust must work with the school to enable the SEND expertise that is in place to be shared and understood fully, so that pupils get the provision that they need and deserve.

The school's curriculum is not sufficiently developed. Furthermore, the systems to check pupils' progress through the curriculum and identify gaps in learning are not effective. This hinders pupils from building new learning successfully. The school must develop a well-sequenced and coherent curriculum in all subjects so that pupils can build securely on their prior learning and be fully prepared for their next steps.

The school has not secured the strategic oversight needed to identify and address weaknesses in its provision quickly enough. As a result, many pupils experience a poor quality of education. The trust must support the school to continue the very recent growth in its capacity, so that it can stem the current decline in its standards, develop staff's knowledge and expertise and provide pupils with a high-quality education that meets their academic, social and emotional needs fully.

The school has not established a shared vision and agreed values to support and foster the development of a positive school culture that is aspirational for its pupils in all that they can achieve socially, emotionally and academically. At present, the school's current practice is impacting negatively on too much of its community, including pupils, staff and families. The trust must work with the school to enable it to swiftly stem the current decline, so that it can transform and provide a high-quality education for its pupils and improve the experience of the school for all.

Leaders and trustees are taking effective action to improve the school but continued work is needed to remove the special measures designation.

HMCI strongly recommends that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any further monitoring inspection we carry out.

During the monitoring inspection, inspectors focused on the following evaluation areas:

- Leadership and governance
- Inclusion
- Curriculum and teaching
- Behaviour

Leadership and governance

Leaders, with support of the trust, have strengthened the school's leadership structure, particularly the senior leadership capacity. These changes have enabled the school to focus on securing improvements. School and trust leaders have a clearer understanding of the context of the school and the needs of the community. The decisions they make are increasingly in the best interests of pupils. Leaders have a more secure understanding of the school's strengths and the areas for development. Leaders are in the process of developing greater strategic oversight to address improvement work. They have identified priority areas accurately and have a clear plan in place to address areas for development.

Since the last inspection, the school has undergone significant turbulence. Shortly after the principal was appointed in December 2025, the school buildings were destroyed by fire. Leaders acted with tenacity and pace in the aftermath. They established online learning within days to enable pupils to continue with their learning. They located education sites within weeks of the fire. Leaders ensured that all pupils returned to school quickly.

Leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality education to all pupils. However, they rightly recognise they are in the early phases of improvement. Therefore, their vision is not yet realised through strong, shared values, policies and practice.

Safeguarding

At the previous graded inspection, safeguarding was evaluated as being effective.

Inclusion

Previously, the school did not identify pupils' academic needs effectively. As a result, pupils did not consistently receive appropriate support to reduce their barriers to learning. Leaders have rightly taken steps to strengthen their inclusive practices. The school's systems and processes for identification and removal of barriers to learning are developing well.

Leaders have established a highly bespoke learning intervention classroom. There are some promising signs. Steps to support pupils to manage their emotions are beginning to help pupils develop resilience. However, it is very early days, and too early to establish any long-term impact on pupils.

Leaders work increasingly collaboratively with families and professionals to ensure pupils receive the support they need. Importantly, they have begun work to strengthen the provision for pupils' future pathways. Leaders use alternative provision appropriately for those pupils with the most complex barriers to learning. Leaders select placements carefully so that provision matches pupils' individual needs.

Leaders do not assure themselves sufficiently well that the use of targeted funding, such as the pupil premium, is precisely aligned to pupils' identified needs or that the impact of this spending is evaluated robustly. Leaders recognise the need to review and update the strategy so that it reflects current priorities and supports clearer accountability for the use of pupil premium funding.

Behaviour

Leaders approach to tackling behaviour is increasingly coherent and focused. They have undertaken a comprehensive overhaul of the behaviour policy. It is now firmly underpinned by the values of 'ready, respectful and safe'. The policy incorporates a more relational approach. It sets out clear boundaries as well as identifying increased opportunities for praise.

Leaders have rationalised systems for recording behavioural incidents. Consequently, they now have a clearer and more accurate understanding of behaviour patterns over time. Leaders have ensured that expectations about behaviour are well communicated to pupils, including through the use of visual supports such as widgets. Staff have benefited from appropriate and useful training focused on de-escalation strategies to manage specific behaviours.

The establishment of the intervention base has shown early signs of success in meeting the behavioural needs of identified pupils. Leaders work more effectively with parents and a range of external agencies to provide targeted support for pupils who require additional support to manage their behaviour.

Leaders acknowledge there is more to do to ensure that all staff are trained well to consistently implement the behaviour policy so that it is understood by all pupils.

Curriculum and teaching

The school's curriculum is increasingly planned to be broad and to provide pupils with a rich set of experiences across academic, technical and vocational subjects. Leaders have rightly placed a sharp focus on reading. Pupils in the early stages of learning to read are benefiting from a more sequenced and coherent curriculum that sets out the important skills and knowledge they need. Leaders have ensured that staff have received training to gain the necessary expertise to deliver the phonics curriculum as intended. Those pupils who fall behind are now beginning to receive support to catch up and develop increasing fluency. Leaders recognise that the reading curriculum in upper key stage 3 and key stage 4 needs further strengthening.

Leaders have introduced a more purposeful curriculum in key stage 4. It is designed to prepare pupils for their next stage of education or employment. However, this approach is in its infancy. Leaders recognise that more needs to be done to ensure pupils fully benefit from the curriculum.

Leaders know that further work is required to ensure that other curriculum subjects are coherently designed and implemented effectively. Currently, some subject design lacks coherence. In addition, the way the curriculum is taught does not routinely ensure pupils know and remember important content. Assessment practices remain underdeveloped. This means that pupils cannot build on prior knowledge effectively.

Additional next steps

Leaders and trustees should continue to work to address the priorities for improvement identified in the last graded inspection report.

About this inspection

The inspector carried out this monitoring inspection under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005, and it was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded inspection that took place in June 2025.

The school's previous inspection was carried out under the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) at that time. The renewed EIF took effect from 10 November 2025. The areas for improvement identified at the school's graded inspection have been cross-referenced to the relevant evaluation areas in the inspection toolkit for consideration on this monitoring inspection.

The purpose of this monitoring inspection was not to determine grades for any of the evaluation areas set out in the school inspection toolkit. The purpose was to identify and report on the school's progress in addressing priorities for improvement since the school's previous inspection.

All pupils at the school have education, health and care plans. The school provides education for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and social, emotional and mental health needs.

The school makes use of 10 providers of alternative provision, including 9 that are unregistered.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. This includes the appointment of a new principal.

The school buildings were completely destroyed by fire in January 2026.

Pupils are currently located at 3 sites. These are Okehampton Primary School, Okehampton College and Okehampton Post-16.

During this inspection, meetings were held with the principal, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust, other staff, the chair of the board of trustees, other trustees and the deputy CEO of Wave Multi Academy Trust the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection.

Lead inspector

Liz Geller

His Majesty's Inspector

About this school

School capacity	100
Number of pupils on roll	79
Resourced provision or SEND unit (if applicable)	Yes
Type of specialist provision (if applicable)	The school provides SEND provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and social, emotional and mental health needs

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
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