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Mrs Tracey Burgess
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Dear Mrs Burgess

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Venerable Bede Church of England Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 30 September 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in January 2025.

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, Thomas Wraith, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, other staff and 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 held meetings about behaviour and attendance, visited lessons, talked to pupils, reviewed school improvement documentation and met with curriculum leaders. 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

There have been several changes to the school's leadership team since the previous inspection. The trust appointed new senior staff, including two deputy headteachers and an assistant headteacher. Trust-level roles such as an executive director of secondary education and school improvement leaders have also been appointed, which has built capacity in the central team to support you with school improvement. These appointments are starting to have an impact on improving the school.

You and the central trust team have quickly identified the underlying causes of the school's weaknesses. A detailed plan for rapid improvement has been developed and implemented. The actions set out in this plan are having a positive effect on pupils' experiences.

The vision for the school's curriculum has been made clear to all staff. Subject leaders have used this vision as a starting point to set out what pupils should know in each subject. Some subjects are further forward than others with this. You have prioritised core subjects in the first wave of curriculum development and made some significant changes, such as moving examination boards and increasing teaching hours. Subject leaders have benefitted from collaboration with trust colleagues, which has enabled them to set out clearly what pupils should learn and when. The alignment of the school's curriculum with other schools in the trust allows for accurate standardisation and moderation.

The curriculum is now generally well sequenced and followed closely by teachers. The trust has developed a teaching and learning strategy, which sets out the important principles that underpin high-quality teaching. However, teaching remains variable in some areas of the curriculum. You recognise that there is more to do to embed the teaching and learning strategy consistently across the school. This includes ensuring that teachers check what pupils know and whether they have the foundational knowledge to secure future learning. You have taken appropriate steps to review how you assess pupils' understanding of the key learning. Again, this is being embedded across the school and you recognise that there remain inconsistencies in some areas.

The school is actively promoting reading across all key stages. The new reading room and dedicated tutor time for reading are raising its profile. Pupils at the early stages of reading access phonics intervention and pupils have their reading ability checked upon entry to the school. This is helping to ensure more pupils are becoming fluent and confident readers. There is further work needed to ensure that this information is used effectively to inform pupils' next steps in reading.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is improving. You have ensured that statutory requirements, including annual reviews, are met. Every pupil with SEND has a pupil passport that sets out key information about their individual needs, along with strategies to support effective classroom practice. That said, there

remains variability in how well some teachers use this information to adapt their teaching. This means that some pupils with SEND do not learn the curriculum as well as they should.

There has been a focus on improving behaviour across the school and creating a calm, safe environment for pupils to learn in. Pupils and staff know that expectations have been raised. You support pupils to meet the high standards you have put into place. Your strategy of 'meet and greet' is helping pupils to feel welcome and positive about the start of the school day. Pupils are now ready to learn as you ensure they are provided with equipment. You have created a culture of 'Team Venerable Bede', which staff and pupils buy into. This has changed the attitudes of pupils with the vast majority now meeting expectations.

The number of serious behavioural incidents has declined, leading to a reduction in the use of suspensions. Staff have been supported with how to respond when pupils do not meet the high expectations set for behaviour. There is a focus on addressing the underlying causes of poor behaviour. Staff training to support the consistent implementation of the school's behaviour approach is in place. This means that pupils experience less variability in how staff manage their behaviour.

Since the previous inspection, you have strengthened the school's approach to improving attendance through a more systematic and strategic focus. The importance of regular attendance is promoted consistently across the school, from form tutors to senior leaders. This approach has led to improved attendance for some groups of pupils. While there has been some reduction in the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school, overall, this figure remains high. You are working to further improve attendance for pupils, especially those who are vulnerable.

The trust and those responsible for governance have acted swiftly and decisively to support the school's improvement. A new governance group has been established to oversee and evaluate progress towards the school's priorities. The trust has strengthened the local governing body through new appointments that bring valuable expertise. Together, these bodies provide effective support and challenge to the school. The trust and local governing body receive regular information from you and trust colleagues, which enables them to assess the impact of the actions taken. While some improvements are more embedded and having impact, others are at an early stage and the impact of these is not currently visible

The school is benefiting from its work with the trust. The trust is providing the support and capacity needed to secure improvement. Staff now have access to subject networks across the trust, which are beginning to strengthen the quality of teaching. Leaders at all levels are mindful of staff workload and have taken steps to manage it carefully. Staff appreciate the opportunities to share their views and the support that they receive.

The school is strengthening relationships with parents and carers as well as the wider community. Initiatives, such as inviting parents to meet yourself and other members of staff, have had a positive uptake. You are keen to build stronger parental engagement. Some aspects of this work are still developing, but initial feedback from parents has been positive.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees the CEO of the Northern Lights Learning Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Durham, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jessica McKay
His Majesty's Inspector