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Dear Mr McKeown

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Cornelius Vermuyden School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 10 and 11 July 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in November 2023

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, 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, Sarah Fowler, Ofsted Inspector (OI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, chief executive officers (CEO) from your partner trusts, trustees and a representative from the local authority 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 visited lessons, met with subject leaders, reviewed curriculum plans, and held discussions with pupils and staff. 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 requiring special measures.

I am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers in science and geography only.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the inspection, there have been significant changes in leadership and governance. You joined the school in April. The leadership team has been restructured. New leaders and governors, with significant experience of school improvement have been brought in. In the past, the school has found it difficult to recruit and been reliant on supply staff. However, you have been able to ensure you are fully staffed for the autumn term 2024.

As soon as you arrived, you quickly identified the underlying causes of the school's weaknesses. A detailed plan for improvement was rapidly developed and implemented. While still in the early stages, the actions set out in this plan are already having a positive impact on pupils' experiences. At the same time, you and leaders from the trust have had to deal with other significant structural issues, including finance and human resources matters. This has not hindered the rate of improvement.

The vision for the school's curriculum has been made clear to all staff. Subject leaders have used this vision to set out what pupils should know in each subject. Some subjects have used the national curriculum and gone beyond its requirements. However, a small number of subjects remain constrained by external influences, such as exam specifications. Pupils are accessing an ambitious curriculum. However, opportunities are missed where teachers could deepen and enrich pupils' knowledge. As a result, some pupils do not archive as well as the school intends.

The curriculum is now generally well planned. Working alongside subject communities, from the partner trusts, the school has set out what pupils should learn and when. This enables pupils to build on existing knowledge as they layer new, small component elements on top of each other. Teachers are generally teaching to these plans. However, teaching remains imprecise and lacks a sense of coherence. Many teachers have strong subject knowledge. They know the important principles that underpin high-quality teaching. However, they are yet to fully understand how to use them. Teachers teach to the written plans, not the pupils in front of them. They do not routinely check to see if pupils have the foundational knowledge they need to secure new learning. Teaching is not adapted to meet the needs of pupils. As a result, at times work is too easy. Too many learning activities are not appropriate to support pupils secure knowledge into their long-term memory. Teaching approaches are often focused on task completion and behaviour management. The result of this is that pupils often experience lessons that are uninteresting and uninspiring. Consequently, pupils do not make the progress they are capable of.

The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is developing. Leaders have made sure that statutory processes, such as annual reviews, are now followed. All pupils with SEND have a pupil passport. Pupils value the input they have had to developing their individual plans. This provides teachers with important information about each individual pupil. These passports also provide strategies to help

teachers adapt their teaching. However, not all have had the training to implement these strategies effectively.

You have taken appropriate steps to improve the behaviour of pupils. The school has made expectations clear to staff and pupils. There are clear boundaries of what is and what is not acceptable. Pupils understand how they are expected to behave. The behaviour, SEND and safeguarding teams are now working closely together. They identify and address patterns and trends in behaviour before they become a problem. Most pupils have responded positively, and behaviour has improved. However, a significant number of lessons continue to be interrupted by the behaviour of some pupils. Pupils are often seen in corridors, sent from their lesson by teachers. This does not help as you try to reduce the level of internal truancy.

Your teams have made the school a warmer and more inclusive place. Pupils feel safe and now have confidence to report their worries to staff. Pupils and staff do not feel afraid as they move around the building. There remain some pupils who struggle to deal with issues without physical confrontation, but these incidents are becoming rare. There are emerging positive relationships between staff and pupils. However, many pupils are frustrated and angered. They feel they have been let down by the school in the past. The majority of pupils want to come to school and learn in a calm and purposeful environment. They find it difficult to understand why it is taking so long for it to improve.

The number of significant behavioural incidents has reduced. Consequently, the use of suspension has also fallen. You have made it clear to staff how they should respond to pupils when they do not meet your high expectations. There is more focus on tackling the root causes of behaviour. Training for staff to help them manage behaviour as you expect has begun. This has seen some benefits but not all staff have fully understood. This means there remains inconsistencies in how staff deal with poor behaviour.

Staff are now clear that the safeguarding of pupils is everyone's responsibility. Increased training and regular communication means that all staff are fully aware of what to look for and how to report concerns. Input from local agencies, such as the police, complement the school's personal social and health education programme. This helps pupils develop a deeper awareness of how to stay safe, on and offline. You have redefined how the behaviour, SEND, safeguarding and pastoral teams work together. This has begun to ensure that there is a greater understanding across the staff about the most vulnerable pupils. Staff now have all the expected checks in advance of taking up roles. Safeguarding is becoming fully embedded into the culture of the school. Consequently, safeguarding is more effective.

The changes to the trust board now mean that a group of highly experienced members are holding staff and leaders to account. The level of expertise on the board means that the questions they ask are incisive. Trustees expect detailed responses from your team that are supported by evidence. This means that there is a well-informed clear picture of where the school has improved and where actions have not had the desired impact.

The school is benefiting from the innovative partnership with The South East Essex, Basildon and Zenith Academies Trusts. Working together with a strong, shared moral purpose they are helping the school make the improvements needed. They have committed to providing additional capacity for as long as it is necessary. Your staff have access to their established subject communities. This is beginning to help teachers improve how they teach. Access to the trusts' combined resources and expertise has undoubtedly contributed towards the improvements pupils are already benefitting from.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Essex County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Dave Gibson
His Majesty's Inspector