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19 January 2023

Stuart Reynolds
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Reynolds

Special measures monitoring inspection of Southchurch High School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 7 and 8 December 2022, 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 March 2022.

During the inspection, Cathy Barr, Ofsted Inspector (OI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the CEO of the multi-academy trust, other staff 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.

During the inspection, we scrutinised a range of documents, including leaders' plans for improvement. We visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, spoke to pupils from different year groups and reviewed the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). We gathered the views of a range of staff. We considered parents' views through Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including written comments. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Southchurch High School remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

There have been changes in leadership since the previous inspection, including a new special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator (SENCo), an acting deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers. Previously, the school inappropriately separated pupils by sex in some lessons. This practice stopped immediately after the inspection in March 2022. The school now conforms to the Equality Act 2010. On this monitoring inspection, we focused on the key weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report.

You, well supported by the trust, are bringing about improvements in the school's curriculum planning, in line with the weaknesses raised in the previous inspection. You have appointed additional leaders to undertake this work. You have been working closely with subject leaders to develop their expertise and curriculum planning. There are subjects where curriculum planning and assessment are effective in supporting teachers' delivery and pupils' learning. However, in some subjects, curriculum plans do not identify the precise knowledge that pupils need to learn. In these instances, learning is confusing for some pupils. Additionally, assessment is not always helpful as it is linked to examinations rather than what pupils learn.

This term, you have provided training and guidance for staff on your 'non-negotiables'; ways in which you want staff to implement and deliver the curriculum to pupils. Where these practices are being used well, pupils are beginning to make better progress with their learning. However, some staff do not fully understand how to implement these non-negotiables effectively. Your leaders know this and it is reflected in their plans and next steps.

Your approach to supporting pupils who need help to catch up in their reading is still in its infancy. A new reading programme for these pupils has just started. Any gaps in pupils' reading knowledge are being identified when they join the school. This is helping your team to put in place support for those who find reading tricky. This information is passed on to your teachers. At this stage, teachers do not use this information well enough to support these pupils to access the curriculum.

For too long, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have not had the right support to help them access the curriculum. With the trust and external support, your team has begun to address this serious issue. The new SENCo is currently being supported by an external adviser. Pupils' needs are being identified more precisely and recorded in documents called 'pupil passports'. These passports provide staff with vital information about how to help pupils with SEND. Some teachers are not using the information to inform their teaching. Pupils with SEND and their parents are not feeling the benefit of this recent work. Many still feel unsupported by the school.

You relaunched your behaviour systems in the summer term 2022. Teachers are using the systems with increasing consistency to address poor behaviour. Your leaders are now analysing behaviour trends, so they are spotting patterns in behaviour and bullying. This

means that they are putting better support in place for pupils who struggle with their behaviour. You and the team have a much better understanding about what is working well and what more needs to be done to address poor behaviour. The personal, social, health and economic education programme is ensuring that pupils are taught more effectively about bullying, prejudicial behaviour and respecting others. While bullying and prejudicial language still happen, you and your team are addressing this more robustly than before.

Lots of the pupils that we spoke to feel that your raised expectations are making the school a much nicer place to be. Many pupils say that they now trust adults to sort out issues when they occur and are more confident to speak out about issues that upset them. However, they are exceptionally articulate in how some staff still do not address behaviour consistently well. Many parents remain concerned and frustrated by issues related to behaviour and bullying.

You are ensuring that staff access training and development to help them implement the curriculum and the behaviour policy more effectively. Staff understand the need to raise expectations in the classroom, including for pupils' behaviour. You and your team are mindful of staff workload and well-being. However, a small number of staff are struggling with the increased expectations and workload needed to turn the school around.

The trust stepped in quickly to support governors and your team in addressing the significant weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. The trust is now putting in support which helps you. Governors, recognising they needed it, have undertaken essential training, so they are now better equipped with the skills and knowledge to hold you and your team to account. The trust and governors have commissioned external support to help and guide your leaders, for example in how to improve the support for pupils with SEND.

Your plans for improvement focus on the right things and are adjusted as the school improves. The statement of action is fit for purpose. There are early signs of meaningful improvement in the areas of weakness identified in the previous inspection. You all know that there is still much to do for this to be embedded and sustained and have the positive impact it needs to on the experience of pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Partnership Learning multi-academy trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Southend-on-Sea. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Damian Loneragan
His Majesty's Inspector