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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Tracy Airoll
Interim Headteacher
Southchurch High School
Southchurch Boulevard
Southend-on-Sea
SS2 4XA

Dear Mrs Airoll

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 14 and 15 June 2023, 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 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, Carole Herman and Diana Fletcher (Ofsted Inspectors), and I considered the effectiveness of the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We held discussions with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer from Partnership Learning trust, staff from the trust, other school staff and governors. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, spoke to pupils from different year groups and reviewed the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). We scrutinised a range of documentation, including safeguarding information. We gathered the views of a range of staff. I met with a group of parents from the parent council. We also considered parents' views through Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including written comments. We have considered all this in coming to the 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 significant changes to the school's leadership team since the first monitoring visit, in December 2022. You are now the interim headteacher. Other leaders have stepped up into interim leadership positions. There is a newly appointed special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator. While your school has faced recent staffing turbulence, the school is fully staffed for September 2023.

You, supported by the new leadership team and the trust, continue to improve the quality of education that pupils experience. We explored the curriculum offer in a number of subjects with your leaders. This was to test out whether your team are taking the necessary actions to improve the curriculum. These subjects have clear curriculum documentation. This helps teachers to plan lessons that support pupils' learning. Staff, including those with less experience or who are new to the school, benefit from leaders' guidance to improve their practice. This includes targeted and personalised professional development support. Staff are following curriculum plans more closely. The consistency in how staff teach your curriculum continues to improve. While pupils that we spoke to agree, they also recognise that some lessons still do not help them to learn. You recognise that this work is not complete and there are still some significant subjects, such as mathematics, that need further action to ensure that the curriculum is taught effectively and consistently across the school.

You continue to focus on improving the learning for pupils with SEND. Pupils' needs are identified more quickly and effectively than previously. There is better quality support for pupils with SEND, including a new approach to mentor these pupils. This small group mentoring strategy enables staff to better understand pupils' additional needs and barriers to learning. A growing number of staff use this information in their lessons to adapt their teaching so that pupils with SEND can access the curriculum more effectively. More pupils with SEND and their parents recognise that provision is strengthening. Despite this, there remain a small number yet to be convinced. This is because some of your staff still do not support pupils with SEND well enough to learn successfully and behave appropriately.

Your approach to supporting the weakest readers is now more established than when we visited in December 2022. The new reading programme is having a tangible impact on pupils who find reading tricky. The quality of pupils' reading support is becoming a strength of the school. An increasing number of pupils have a greater reading knowledge. This helps them to access the curriculum across different subjects.

You and your leaders have reflected on and refined the school's approach to behaviour. In particular, how to support pupils to interact with each other in a positive manner. Your team has recently strengthened how pupils are taught about important issues like respect and consent. Pupils have noticed the difference in behaviour, including the greater respect pupils have for each other. Many more pupils use the anonymous reporting systems to let staff know if they have a worry or concern. Most pupils trust you and your team to sort

out any issues of prejudicial language or bullying. Despite this positive work, a small number of pupils still behave negatively.

Your members of your team recognise the link between pupils' poor behaviour choices and their learning in the classroom. Your own analysis shows that too many pupils with SEND are being removed from the classroom and are not engaging in learning. You continue to support staff to implement the school's behaviour strategies fairly and consistently. Likewise, to help staff to create positive classroom environments where pupils' needs are sufficiently met. Your 'curriculum plus' scheme, which ensures that pupils with SEND are supported, is well-intended but has only just started.

It was clear in the previous monitoring visit that a number of pupils and their parents lacked trust in the school. You, supported by the trust, met with parents. You acknowledged and explained the work that needs to be carried out to improve the school. You quickly set up the 'parent council' and 'parent forum' to give parents opportunities to constructively voice their concerns and support you in making the school a better place to learn. This is beginning to make a difference. Some parents told us that they now feel listened to and that their concerns are being addressed. This is a positive start. There remains much more to do.

A renewed focus on the wider curriculum is making a difference to pupils' school experience. Improved tutor time, an increasing range of engaging trips and experiences and a relaunched house system form part of your improved 'pillars' of personal development. This is helping staff to get to know their pupils better and build positive relationships beyond the classroom. You want all pupils to enjoy school life and know that adults care about them. Pupils we spoke to recognise this positive shift in the school's culture.

The trust and governing body continue to support and challenge you to ensure all change is in pupils' best interests. Trust support, alongside the use of external specialists, helps your team to reflect on what is working and what is not. Your improvement plan has sharpened since the previous monitoring visit. It focuses more clearly on the actions that will make the school better. More staff are on board with the school's improvement journey. Staff workload remains high but reflects the work there is still to do. Staff recognise that leaders are trying to reduce the strain on them where possible. You, your leaders and those responsible for governance are clear that the school must continue to improve, sustainably and quickly.

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