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Stephen Huntington
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Dear Mr Huntington

Special measures monitoring inspection of Smith's Wood Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 12 and 13 March 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in March 2023.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's key 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, Geoff Renwick, Ofsted Inspector (OI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the chair of the trust board and the director of education 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 visited lessons, including form time; met with a range of leaders, teachers and pupils; observed behaviour in lessons and at social times and reviewed documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, and staff and parent surveys. 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 requiring special measures. Safeguarding is effective.

HMCI is of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

This visit focused on the quality of education and behaviour and attitudes.

Since the last inspection, you have made further improvements to staffing. For example, although there are some vacancies remaining for the next academic year, you have been successful in securing staff for the English and mathematics departments. This means that pupils are now receiving more consistent teaching from adults they know. Newly appointed staff, including those who met with inspectors, share the school's vision and clarity of purpose. Typically, staff are committed to working as a team to continue to make the improvements needed.

You continue to make good use of the support from the trust. The trust, for instance, has provided timely input to support in the leadership of specific subjects and to challenge your evaluations of some aspects of the school's work. This support is helping with the capacity needed to improve the range of areas on which you are working. In addition, it is ensuring that your evaluations about the quality of the school's work are more accurate.

You have implemented additional measures to reduce internal truancy. By consistently redeploying staff and leaders maintaining a visible presence during lessons, you have effectively tackled the issue of pupils missing classes. Your actions to improve attendance are continuing to have a positive impact. Pupils' absence from school continues to reduce, particularly for those that are persistently absent.

You have made the way lessons are structured clearer and more consistent. Pupils and staff who talked to the inspectors know exactly what 'do now activities' are and why they are used in lessons. Pupils say that teachers are using these more consistently across subjects, and these activities are helping them remember important knowledge over time. Nonetheless, you and your team have identified that further work is required to improve the use of assessment, particularly in key stage 3.

You and your leaders are taking steps to develop staff knowledge and expertise in adapting learning to meet the needs of all pupils. Recently, staff members received training on how to adapt learning in the specific subjects they teach. This is starting to have a positive impact. As a result, staff are becoming more consistent in how they adapt their teaching to meet pupils' needs.

You have taken further action to improve reading. The work by the English department to develop a culture of reading across the curriculum is beginning to take hold. Additionally, you have improved the support for pupils who are still in the early stages of reading. More pupils are now receiving the help they need.

Your work on improving careers advice is having a positive impact. Careers staff are providing more opportunities for pupils to connect with the world of work. For instance, many Year 10 Pupils have secured work experience placements for the spring term. In addition, pupils have visited local businesses, and these businesses are partnering with the school to mentor pupils and share insights about life after Year 11. All of this is helping to prepare pupils better for their next steps.

The school is developing its approaches to help pupils remember key knowledge over time. As part of this work, you rightly continue to review the impact and effectiveness of homework for the pupils.

Safeguarding remains effective. You and your senior team continue to address previous concerns around the culture of safeguarding effectively. There is now an embedded culture of safeguarding of which pupils and staff talk positively. Your safeguarding team has detailed knowledge of where pupils are if they do not arrive in school. This knowledge continues to be a strength of the school. Staff, including some of the most recently appointed, speak confidently, and in detail, about the safeguarding training they receive, including how to identify safeguarding concerns.

You and your leaders have taken steps to further engage with parents, carers and staff. For example, you have engaged successfully with staff, who recognise the improvements being made at the school and their role in it. Staff appreciate that you look to ensure the school is improved systematically and take their workload into account. Although more parents are positive about the work of the school than at the time of the graded inspection, some still have concerns about the management of behaviour and learning. You rightly have plans to develop how you further improve engagement with parents and carers in the future.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Fairfax Multi-Academy trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Solihull local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Clarkson
His Majesty's Inspector