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9 December 2022

Steven Fryer
Interim Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Fryer

Special measures monitoring inspection of Leek High School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 9 and 10 November 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, Rob Hackfath, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the CEO of the multi-academy trust, trustees and members of the interim executive board (IEB) 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 met staff and reviewed school policies and documents, including safeguarding records and the school's website. We spoke to pupils, visited lessons and visited the school's isolation room. I also considered the views of parents and staff expressed through Ofsted Parent View and the staff survey. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leek 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

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the school's leadership. You were appointed as interim executive headteacher in May 2022, and an IEB was appointed to replace the local governing body at the same time. The trust has seconded a deputy headteacher from another trust, and an assistant headteacher from a school in the trust also works for one day a week at your school.

Leaders have developed an appropriate plan for improving the school. The trust acted swiftly to tackle some of the immediate shortcomings. They appointed well-qualified and experienced school leaders to sit on the IEB. Members of the IEB know the school well and are clear about the next steps that you need to take and the barriers that you are facing. The trust also secured support from leaders in another trust. However, there is sometimes conflict between the actions that leaders are taking and the advice and challenge received from other sources. This means that school leaders do not always focus well enough on tackling the most important issues that the school is experiencing. Leaders do not implement the action plan consistently and effectively and governors have not held leaders to account for this sufficiently well. For example, leaders and those responsible for governance have not made sure that plans to address poor behaviour are working as well as they should. As a result, too much of leaders' time is spent dealing with day-to-day behaviour issues, and this is preventing other areas of the school's work from being successful.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons frequently disrupts the learning of others. You have introduced a behaviour system that focuses on simple rules for pupils to follow. You report that when this was first introduced, behaviour improved. However, these improvements have not been sustained. Too many lessons are disturbed by low-level disruption, and teachers do not tackle this consistently. Leaders have not ensured that all staff have the right training to help them to implement the new policy. This means that pupils do not benefit from consistently high expectations of their behaviour. There is not a staged approach in place to manage behaviour. As a result, the number of suspensions remains too high. Leaders have not monitored the new behaviour system well enough, and this has prevented you from taking the right actions to improve pupils' behaviour.

You rightly prioritised safeguarding following the last inspection and you have ensured that safeguarding is effective. You made sure that pre-employment checks for new staff are in place, and you ensure that these are recorded appropriately. You recognised that staff required further training and provided this for all staff at the beginning of the school year. Staff are clear about the risks that pupils may face and are vigilant in identifying and recording concerns about pupils. Leaders are knowledgeable about their pupils and pass on the concerns that they have about them. However, leaders and those responsible for governance do not have sufficient oversight of all areas of safeguarding. This has led to some gaps in policies and training.

You have begun work on building an effective curriculum. Subject leaders from Leek High School work with the local middle school to make sure that the curriculum builds

effectively from Year 8 into Year 9. Subject leaders are starting to identify the important knowledge that pupils need to learn and are beginning to sequence this well. This work is still in its early stages and there is still more work to do. Leaders have focused on introducing a common structure for lessons in the school. They have not yet thought about how to make sure that all teachers build their understanding of how to teach their subjects well. You have introduced an assessment strategy for all subjects to follow, but this is not yet sufficiently matched with the curriculum development work that is happening.

Leaders have devised plans for improving the learning of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The newly introduced pupil passports are designed to provide teachers with information about how to support pupils with SEND most effectively. However, these documents are not detailed enough, and teachers do not receive appropriate training to help them meet pupils' needs. Leaders know this and have plans to address it.

Leaders have begun work on creating a culture of reading in the school. A structured reading programme has been introduced, and there is a tutor reading programme. Some pupils do not experience high-quality reading in tutor time, however, and leaders have not monitored this well enough. Pupils who do not yet read fluently do not receive the help that that they need.

You have decided to strengthen existing systems and processes to improve attendance. Leaders are beginning to scrutinise the data more thoroughly and this is helping them to direct their attentions more effectively. Leaders are not yet analytical enough about what is and is not working in terms of attendance, which limits the effectiveness of the actions they are taking to try to improve it.

You have identified the recruitment and retention of staff as an issue for the school. The chair of the IEB is mindful of the workload and well-being of staff at the school and these are being monitored regularly.

You are receiving support from the CEO of a local trust and from the local authority safeguarding leader. You value all of this support and we agreed that it continues to be something that the school very much needs to help it to move forward.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Talentum Learning Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Price
His Majesty's Inspector