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Nicola Crookshank
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Dear Ms Crookshank

Special measures monitoring inspection of Thomas Ashton School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 1 and 2 October 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 key and (where applicable) provision judgements, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school, parents and carers any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, staff, governors, the local authority and a representative of the trust that has been supporting the school, 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 carried out visits to lessons, met with pupils and parents, and looked at documents provided by the school. 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.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

A new executive headteacher joined the school in January 2024. The leadership team has been restructured as a result. In addition to this, following the last inspection, all members of the governing body resigned from their posts. The local authority has secured a new governing body.

The school and the local authority have plans for the school to join a trust in January 2025. While the plans for this transition are being finalised, the school have been supported by some members of the trust's central team.

On this first monitoring visit, I focused on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. Additionally, I evaluated some aspects of the curriculum.

The school has made improving pupils' behaviour it's top priority. It has reviewed its approach to behaviour management to create a more focused learning environment. It has recently introduced new procedures which outline a clearer allocation of responsibilities at all levels. This has ensured that everyone in the school is clear about their role in managing pupils' behaviour. Additional training means that staff are suitably equipped to implement the agreed approach. Leaders, alongside the pastoral team, are becoming more strategic in their approach to monitoring behaviour and responding to the trends that they have identified. There are some early signs that, for most pupils, this new approach is working well and that disruption in lessons is reducing. However, some pupils do not receive the support that they need to make sure that they can rejoin their class quickly and continue with their learning. This means a small number of pupils are not accessing the full curriculum.

The school has begun to analyse the reasons for pupils' absence more closely. This is leading to a more personalised approach to supporting parents to make sure that pupils attend school regularly. This has made a difference to some pupils. Even so, attendance rates remain low compared to the national average. Many pupils continue to miss considerable periods of time away from school. This has a negative impact on their achievement.

The school has worked closely with the safeguarding leaders in the local authority and from the trust. This collaboration has enabled the school to strengthen the arrangements for keeping pupils safe. For example, the systems for reporting and recording safeguarding concerns are much more effective than they were in the past. The profile of safeguarding has been raised across the school. The school has ensured that staff are clear about the procedures that they must follow to report any concerns about a pupil's welfare. Senior leaders and the pastoral team are beginning to use information about safeguarding concerns more strategically to respond to patterns and trends across the school.

The school, with support from the trust, has started to develop the curriculum. This is in the early stages of development, as the school has focused on the more pressing issues linked to pupils' behaviour. While there are signs of improvement in some subjects, the way in which the curriculum is delivered in other subjects remains variable. Improving the curriculum further is the school's next priority.

Since the last inspection, the school has made reading a high priority. It has identified those pupils with gaps in their reading knowledge and it has introduced a programme to help pupils who find reading difficult. The school is taking suitable action to better check how well pupils can read. These checks now identify pupils who need extra help with their reading more quickly than before. These pupils are receiving phonics sessions and help to build their vocabulary.

The school has trained all teachers in phonics delivery to ensure that they can support struggling readers in their lessons when needed. As a result, pupils are becoming increasingly fluent and confident readers who can access the curriculum. However, the school's work to foster a love of reading across the school is at an earlier stage of development. Many pupils do not enjoy reading. This is because pupils do not know how to find books that are appropriate to their age and interests. The school has plans to reopen the library to encourage pupils to find books that they will enjoy.

The school has accepted the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. It has an accurate understanding of the progress that is being made against the areas for improvement. The school has correctly identified the next stage of its development.

The school has welcomed and accepted the external support and expertise provided by the trust. This support has been used in a well-considered way to accelerate improvement. For example, there is greater oversight and challenge, particularly around safeguarding and governance. Staff recognise the considerable changes that have occurred. They appreciate the difference that these are making to the pupils and to themselves.

New members of the governing body have the experience and expertise to strengthen leadership capacity. Governors are better informed about the progress that is being made to tackle the shortcomings at the school. For example, they analyse attendance and behaviour data and use this information to ask relevant and challenging questions.

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

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Sharples
His Majesty's Inspector