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30 April 2024

Angela Sweeten
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sweeten

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Longfield Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 26 March 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in April 2022.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, 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, I discussed with you, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust and those responsible for governance 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 visited lessons, alongside curriculum leaders, in mathematics, history and geography. I scrutinised the single central record and met with leaders to discuss behaviour and attendance data. 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 be no longer judged as having serious weaknesses.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

In 2023, pupils at Longfield Academy made similar progress to other schools in national assessments. However, you have accurately identified that the quality of education across the school still varies. As such, there are some differences in how well pupils achieve in

different subjects by the end of key stage 4. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do not perform as well as their classmates in national assessments.

In most subjects, your school has identified the important knowledge that pupils need to learn. There are some subjects, such as history, where the curriculum is still being refined and improved. This is because your curriculum leaders are new and more time is needed to implement the ambitious plans that they have developed.

Most teachers have thorough subject knowledge. They know their pupils well. Teachers are given clear information about how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils with SEND are helped to access the curriculum alongside their classmates. However, some teachers do not present information clearly to pupils. The most important knowledge that pupils need to learn is not emphasised. This leads to some pupils having gaps in their knowledge. Some teachers do not systematically check that pupils have understood what they have been taught, so gaps in pupil's knowledge go unaddressed.

Your school's 'choices' (behaviour) policy is now embedded. It is understood by teachers and pupils. Teachers use consistent approaches to managing pupil behaviour. This has led to a rise in suspensions at the start of this academic year. Suspensions have now started to reduce. A small number of pupils have demonstrated very challenging behaviour. Despite the support that your school has put in place for these pupils, it has not improved their behaviour. This has led to a high number of permanent exclusions this academic year. Governors and directors of the multi-academy trust board closely monitor the rates of suspensions and permanent exclusion. They challenge leaders to ensure that the decisions taken are in the best interests of the whole school community. Those responsible for governance are well-informed and have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

Pupils' attendance has decreased slightly compared to the previous academic year. Leaders know their pupils well. Staff from the attendance, pastoral and safeguarding teams work closely to understand the causes of poor attendance. This informs the school's actions. As such, the school has reduced the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of Swift Academies trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Voyce
His Majesty's Inspector