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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 10 and 11 December 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 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, 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. I also visited lessons, including tutor time and an assembly; 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

Since the last monitoring inspection, you and your senior team have continued to build on your previous decisions to take the right actions, in the right order and at the right pace to address the weaknesses identified. You have continued to work particularly effectively to further improve behaviour around school and in lessons. You also continue to promote the importance of attendance for all pupils. Significantly, pupils, staff and an increasing number of parents say there is a noticeable positive improvement in behaviour overall. Pupils say they attend school more because they want to learn and they have better opportunities to learn in lessons.

Safeguarding at the school remains effective. You and your senior team continue to address previous concerns around the culture of safeguarding. This is now having a clear and consistent effect on pupils saying they are safe and that they have confidence that staff will act quickly to follow-up any concerns they report. You continue to look at staffing capacity, including for safeguarding, and have expanded the team to further enable a rapid response when contacting home if pupils are absent. Your detailed knowledge of where pupils are if they do not arrive in school 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 continue to receive, including how to identify safeguarding concerns. Safeguarding remains 'everyone's responsibility' in the school and I have seen the positive impact of what you have achieved. As from the last monitoring inspection, you and your staff also know that safeguarding never ends. New staff and new pupils are given clear information around who the key personnel are. These staff are visible around the school every day.

You have continued to recruit key staff across the school, including new members of the senior leadership team and new pastoral/achievement leaders. For January 2025 you have vacancies to fill in English and mathematics. Building from the last monitoring inspection, you regularly review the clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountability, particularly for senior staff. Newly appointed staff, including those who met with the inspector, share the school's vision and clarity of purpose. Your staffing deployment has been strategic and helped reduce any negative impact on pupils' learning. Pupils' needs and the importance of relationships between staff and pupils remain at the heart of what you do. Where you may be waiting for new staff to begin you ensure current, experienced staff are linked with each year group. This has created additional capacity, which is supporting the progress of the school. Building from the last monitoring inspection, staff and pupils are very positive about the changes they have seen in the school. The majority of your staff are committed to working as a team to continue to make the improvements needed. As we also saw from the last monitoring inspection, staff recognise the impact of the clear boundaries that you and the senior team have set for pupils' behaviour and are

working hard to use the school's systems consistently. The training you continue to put in place for staff has been valuable, and many staff are using this training to good effect.

Similarly to the last monitoring inspection, your internal truancy rates throughout the school have noticeably reduced. Through your re-deployment of staff, and visible presence during lessons, you have effectively addressed pupils absenting themselves from lessons and the subsequent issues this causes, such as poor behaviour and impact on learning. Pupils and staff who spoke to the inspector can see these changes and are positive about them. All this has been achieved by leaders and staff working as a team to explicitly teach pupils what is required, to model it to them and to remind them frequently about positive behaviours.

Since my last visit, the majority of staff continue to be more consistent when implementing the school's behaviour policy, including modelling their own interactions with pupils and each other. There continues to be an increased number of positive relationships between staff and pupils, particularly around expectations of conduct. However, while the new behaviour policy is working well, showing some impact and pupils report fewer lessons being disrupted, there is still variability in how well some pupils understand these expectations. Also, as importantly, pupils report that not all staff follow the behaviour policy and expectations consistently enough. This remains an area you continue to review and embed.

As from the last monitoring inspection, we have seen further improvements in pupils' absence. However, for a significant number of pupils absence still continues to be a key barrier to their learning. Ongoing actions have reduced persistent absence rates and you know that this continues to be a key priority over time to reduce persistent absence further.

As with the last monitoring inspection, some subject teachers have recently left the school and you have recruited new subject teachers in some areas. There remain areas where pupils are taught by your own internal cover teachers to minimise impact on the pupils' learning. You continue to review where you need further subject teaching staff during the autumn and spring terms, and also for September 2025.

There has been significant progress to develop clarity around the structure of lessons. Pupils and staff who spoke to the inspector could explain what 'do now activities' (DNA) mean. Pupils report all lessons and all subjects use DNAs and that these activities help pupils to know and remember more of the most important knowledge over time. The inspector visited eight different subject areas and saw many staff taking the opportunity to help pupils remember and re-engage with previous learning, which helps them to make progress. However, as with the last monitoring inspection, while pupils remain positive about these structures, there remains a significant, although reducing, number of pupils who are reluctant to focus on their learning and complete their work. This is still particularly seen in key stage 3. You know there is still more work to do with how pupils in Years 7 to 9 are assessed and around how effective the learning is, compared to more effective learning in key stage 4. You and your senior team are continuing to work with

teachers, including providing ongoing training and development and quality assurance checking, to ensure the use of assessment is more effective in key stage 3. These training and quality assurance checks are one of your key priorities to embed rapidly.

Developing from the last monitoring inspection, you have expanded the leadership team for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). You continue a rapid focus to address the key area of how teachers are adapting the learning to meet the needs of all pupils. While you have begun to embed a consistent structure to each lesson and are now developing the consistency of how key knowledge is sequenced over a period of lessons, you are also aware that many pupils need further support to understand this key knowledge. Also, many other pupils need to have expectations further raised, to extend their knowledge. How and when learning is adapted to both support and challenge all pupils, including pupils with SEND, is a significant area you are looking to develop consistently.

Building from the last monitoring inspection, the English department and other staff, have worked effectively to develop a culture of wider reading in pupils, along with supporting pupils in key stage 3 who are at the earliest stages of reading. However, you also know there is further work to support pupils in key stage 4 who are at the earliest stages of reading. You also know that, while the promotion of reading has improved, there is still a significant majority of pupils for whom reading is not something they experience in enough lessons and are not given enough opportunities to actively read for themselves or with others.

Building from the last monitoring inspection, you and your senior team continue to review and develop clear systems for accountability and the development of strategies, with many more opportunities built in to evaluate the effectiveness of these. You and other leaders know the school in great detail. You know precisely which areas have progressed the most effectively and which areas still need time to develop. Staff know what the school expects from them. Alongside this, staff can talk about their relevant and timely professional development around teaching and learning in the academic and wider curriculum. As with the last monitoring inspection, the vast majority of staff report that workload is fully taken into account during the development of policy and practice. However, you are also aware of a significant minority of staff who have expressed concern with some recent practice around the setting and marking of formal assessments. As you review your expectations, you continue to engage with staff to explain clearly what further developments are needed.

Two areas that you are reviewing and which are at different points of development are careers education and homework. Careers staff have rapidly introduced a number of opportunities for pupils to engage with the world of work. This includes a significant number of Year 10 pupils who have already secured work experience placements in the spring term. Furthermore, pupils have experienced visits to local businesses, as well as businesses partnering with the school to mentor pupils and give direct knowledge of life beyond Year 11. These many opportunities are being further developed in the short and longer terms.

With regard to homework, you are reviewing the impact and effectiveness of homework for the pupils. During this visit, there is a clear difference where pupils report very little homework being set, especially in key stage 3, compared to staff who report that a lot of homework is being set. You have introduced a new homework system, which records the work being set by teachers. This also enables parents and carers to see any homework set. However, staff are still coming to terms with using the new system and pupils report a significant lack of consistency for setting homework across the full curriculum. The purpose and practice of homework is an area you continue to explore and evaluate.

Since the last monitoring inspection, trust leaders have further increased the capacity of senior and subject leadership through recruitment and continued with direct support from specialists within the trust. Where trust personnel are working directly with school leaders over a regular period of time, there is more secure capacity to implement required actions quickly. This support continues to be evaluative and challenges leaders effectively. As seen in the last monitoring inspection, the trust is continuing to work closely with the school and ensures that there is regular contact with you and your leaders.

As we discussed in the last monitoring inspection, you and your senior team continue to develop ways of communicating your expectations to parents. Parents' views of the school are becoming more positive over time. The most recent responses from parents show an increase in positive comments about being happier with how their child feels in school and your higher expectations of the curriculum, behaviour and attendance. Your introduction of a coffee morning continues to develop and bring in parents to listen to your vision around the school and to share their questions and points of view. The impact of this is still in an early stage, as at the last monitoring inspection, but you continue to develop more ways in which the positive progress you have achieved is seen and shared with parents and the wider community.

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