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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Ms Lucie Hernandez
Headteacher
Stowmarket High School
Onehouse Road
Stowmarket
Suffolk
IP14 1QR

Dear Ms Hernandez

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Stowmarket High School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 27 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 took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

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, the chair of the trust, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the director for education of the trust, the chair of the school improvement board, other senior leaders and staff the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. I also met with pupils, visited lessons and reviewed the school's systems and school improvement documentation. I considered responses to the Ofsted survey for parents, Parent View, and two letters and an email from parents. 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 become good.

Main findings

Since the last inspection there has been much change to governance and senior leadership of the school. The trust has new personnel, including a new chair of the trust and CEO. There has also been the appointment of a new director for education. The restructuring and rebranding of the trust has built greater capacity to support the school. The trust board stood down the local academy committee at the beginning of the academic year. A school improvement board was put in its place. The previous headteacher left. The new headteacher and deputy headteacher joined the school in September 2023. The senior leadership team has been restructured and expanded.

Prior to September 2023, improvements in the school were slow. The increase in leadership capacity is enabling improvements to occur at a faster pace. The new personnel in the trust, working with the school improvement board, have driven forward quicker change. Leaders have ensured there is rigour to quality assurance processes. This means that they have clear sight of what is working well and what is not. The school's action plan for improvement identifies the urgent priorities. It gives clear measures of how and when these priorities will be achieved. The trust and the school improvement board make regular checks on progress against the action plan targets. They visit the school often so they can see first-hand the changes that are being made. There is a sharp understanding of how to support and challenge leaders to improve the school.

Improvements to the curriculum are underway. The options process has altered so that pupils have access to the breadth of the curriculum. Subject planning is clearer about the pupils' learning journeys. There is now consistency in the way teachers use assessment across the school. Checking pupils' knowledge and understanding has gained greater prominence. Parents are now in receipt of more information about their child's performance. Staff have embraced the school's advocated pedagogic approaches. These are being delivered consistently. Meet and greet procedures are setting the right tone for the start of lessons. Pupils appreciate the use of the 'Do Now' tasks as they are a helpful reminder of what they have learned previously. They say such starts to lessons get them 'in the mindset to learn'. Pupils report that lessons are more fun and interesting. They like the 'think, pair, share' approach that teachers are using.

In most lessons, pupils learn effectively. Typically, teachers are using the procedures from the new behaviour policy well. Pupils have noted the difference and feel more settled. Suspensions are reducing, significantly so for serious incidents of misbehaviour. The shortened time to move between lessons is having impact. Pupils do not loiter. As a result, the school environment is calm and purposeful. Truancy from lessons is now rare. Leaders and staff are highly visible, and this is making a difference.

Such changes are having a positive impact on pupils' attendance. Members of the new senior leadership team are approachable and well liked. Pupils are enjoying their time at school more. Consequently, overall attendance is better than the current national picture. Leaders' work with families of pupils who are severely absent is highly effective. Pupils in this group are re-engaging with education.

Improving provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is a work in progress. The school has made use of external consultancy to strengthen its identification procedures. This is helping with the formation of pupils' support plans. Pupils have more ownership of their 'pupil passport'. However, they report that sometimes staff use these well and sometimes not. Staff are in receipt of ongoing training regarding how to support pupils with SEND. Leaders have checked that pupils with SEND can access tasks in lessons. Nonetheless, they have not yet considered through their quality assurance processes whether staff use the best methods to help pupils learn effectively. Teachers are not yet adept at applying reasonable adjustments when using the school's policies, for instance, adjusting application of the behaviour policy for pupils with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Staff are working hard to effect change. They are happy to do so as they can see the difference they are making. They appreciate the approachability and high visibility of the senior leadership team. Staff have clear direction and understand the part they play in making the school better. Parents are also supportive of the changes in the school. More would recommend the school as a result.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Smith
His Majesty's Inspector