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Dear Ms Marshall

Special measures monitoring inspection of Oakbank

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 20 and 21 May 2025, 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 2024.

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 and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, Jane Cartwright, Ofsted Inspector (OI), and I discussed with you, the substantive headteacher, other senior leaders, trustees, other trust leaders, and a representative from the local authority, the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We also visited lessons, met with staff and pupils, observed pupils as they moved around the school and scrutinised a range of documentation relating to the school's work. 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.

HMCI strongly recommends that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

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

The school has made a number of changes to leadership since the inspection. These include your appointment as substantive deputy headteacher. You are currently serving as interim headteacher. In addition, 10 teaching staff have left the school with four joining, including a new interim deputy headteacher.

Anthem Trust has provided additional leadership capacity and support to the school. Trust leaders are a regular and visible presence. They are providing support across all aspects of the school's work, including with safeguarding, raising standards, curriculum and pedagogy. In addition, colleagues from the trust are also supporting the school with attendance, provision for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), personal development and literacy.

During this first monitoring visit, I focused primarily on the school's work to improve safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and the quality of education, including provision for pupils with SEND. Your work to improve personal development and a more detailed consideration of the provision for pupils with SEND is likely to be a focus of my next visit.

After the last inspection, the trust prioritised improving safeguarding. In December, the trust commissioned an external review of safeguarding. The local authority also audited the school's safeguarding records to check the quality and timeliness of referrals made to external agencies. The evidence from these reviews, alongside Ofsted's findings, provided the trust with a detailed baseline for the improvements needed.

Since your appointment in January, you have shown high levels of determination and commitment to lead changes on how safeguarding is managed. Safeguarding records are now in line with the requirements of statutory guidance, for example because they highlight the actions the school takes when there is a concern. The school's safeguarding leaders now meet regularly to review cases and decide what further actions need to be taken to support pupils. The local authority reports that the school's engagement with local services has improved. The local authority has also noted that the quality of referrals it receives has significantly improved.

Staff have undertaken additional training, including in the Prevent Duty and in supporting pupils' mental health and well-being. Staff now receive weekly safeguarding updates, which includes information about local contextual issues, along with reminders about what to do and who to tell when they have a concern about a child. You have started to improve pupils' understanding of local risks through additional safeguarding lessons and by making sure that the most vulnerable pupils have a named, trusted adult that they can talk to when they are worried about something. There is also a more effective system now in place to alert senior leaders when a pupil leaves class so that their whereabouts can be monitored.

You have welcomed additional support and oversight from the local authority. The local authority has signposted the school to some bespoke help available from external agencies when individuals are at risk of harm. You have booked in several of these for the coming term to develop pupils' ability to help keep themselves safe. At the start of May, the local authority also provided the school, on a temporary basis, with onsite trained social work support for three days a week. A growing number of pupils are now being supported. There is strong communication with pupils and their families about the range of help available when things get tricky at home.

However, the judgement remains that the arrangements for safeguarding are not effective. This is because there is not yet a securely embedded culture of safeguarding in the school. Although many pupils said that they feel safe, some were not confident that adults would act if they had a concern. In part, this is because of the high turnover of staff in recent years and months. Some pupils feel that they do not know or trust some staff well enough to tell them when they are worried. Some pupils are not confident that the use of sexist, racist or homophobic language from their peers would be tackled by staff. In addition, when tutor times are taught by someone who is not the usual tutor, pupils do not receive their entitlement of personal, social and health education. This means their learning about how to keep themselves safe is hindered. Furthermore, the school has not yet reviewed the impact of all its actions. This means it does not have an accurate picture of how consistently new procedures are used and followed.

The school is taking effective action to improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. Leaders spent the spring term devising a clear strategy, which outlines what they want to achieve and how they are going to achieve it. The expectations for pupils' behaviour have been made clearer and easier for pupils to follow, and for staff to use. The new policy was launched at the start of the summer term and is already showing signs of success. Pupils understand the new rules. Staff are typically following them, although pupils believe there is some inconsistency between staff in how the rules are applied. Your monitoring shows that behaviour in lessons is calmer in many cases, and there are fewer disruptions to learning.

However, in some lessons, especially where pupils are taught by staff they do not know, pupils' attitudes to learning are not improved. You have recently made some changes to the timetable to reduce the amount of cover pupils experience, and this is starting to help. Leaders also check in on classes that they know have cover lessons to help keep things calm and focused, but you recognise that there is more to do to improve pupils' attitudes to learning in these circumstances.

Alongside changing the behaviour expectations, you have also changed the approach to managing internal suspensions. Pupils' individual needs are now being considered when they are sent to the isolation room. They are supported to manage their emotions before they settle to working quietly. This approach is starting to work well. Fewer pupils are leaving class, and there is a purposeful atmosphere in the new internal isolation space. There are emerging signs that your approach is also starting to help you to identify those pupils who may need extra help to manage their behaviour and keep themselves safe.

Leaders have started to work towards improving pupils' attendance. The school has taken advice from another school within the trust. This is helping to improve how attendance is tracked. Leaders are also now starting to consider a wider range of actions to help improve pupils' attendance. The importance of high levels of attendance is highlighted in the school newsletters and you have introduced some rewards for regular attendance. There is now better organisation of attendance data, which means that the school now knows clearly who the lowest attenders are. Staff have started to build positive relationships with these pupils and their families so that they can best support these pupils to attend more regularly. Leaders also meet regularly with the Education Welfare Officer to ensure that pupils who need it get extra help. Importantly, the leaders I met with displayed an understanding of the risks of non-attendance, including safeguarding risks. Getting these systems up and running is an important and positive step. In particular, staff were rightly proud of the positive impact their work has had on improving the attendance of Year 11 as they lead up to their GCSE examinations. However, you recognise that there is much more to do. The attendance of some groups, including pupils with SEND, is still too low and too many pupils are persistently absent.

Your approach to improving the quality of education is well thought through. With the trust, you have begun to ensure that staff have the knowledge to meet the school's expectations for teaching, known as 'The Anthem Way'. The approaches to monitoring teaching and learning have sharpened and are providing a clear picture of where to prioritise actions. Many staff do follow the school's approaches. Your monitoring shows that there are early signs that pupils' learning is improving. However, the school's success has been hampered by a significant turnover in staffing. The trust has not ensured that temporary staff have the same level of knowledge and expertise to teach the curriculum as intended. This means that pupils continue to experience teaching that does not help them learn as well as they should.

The school is in the early stages of improving how it meets the needs of pupils with SEND. Staff now have access to accurate information about the needs of pupils who have education, health and care plans. Some staff use this information skilfully to ensure pupils' needs are addressed and met. However, some staff do not routinely use this information to help meet pupils' needs and enable them to learn successfully. Your improvement plans show that leaders from the trust have planned a review of provision for pupils with SEND.

As interim headteacher, you recognise the need to support staff's workload and well-being. You have listened to staff's concerns and have acted, for example by improving communication systems between leaders and staff and making the school's expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour clearer. Workload for many staff has increased, for example as new administration systems are set up. There is also additional workload for staff who are covering lessons or teaching outside of their subject expertise. You have made some recent changes to minimise the amount of cover and the number of extra subjects that teachers teach. Leaders are visiting lessons more frequently, so staff feel that there are more people available if they need help. There is a friendly and collegiate atmosphere amongst staff as a result. However, you recognise the need to constantly consider staff's workload and well-being.

After the last inspection, trust leaders wrote an action plan that states how the trust intends to improve the school. This was submitted to the Department for Education. I have reviewed this plan and find that it is fit for purpose. The action plan sets out detailed information about what needs to improve, how, and who is responsible for leading the improvement. There are also useful milestones and timescales for each improvement area. You and other leaders report to trust leaders very regularly about the improvements you are making.

Many trust leaders now work in the school much more regularly than previously. There are processes in place to keep trustees informed about the improvements being made and what needs to happen next. However, the trust has recognised that in the longer term, it does not have the capacity to continue to support the school as much as will be required. A process of re-brokering the school with another trust is now being organised by the Department for Education.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
His Majesty's Inspector