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Carolyn Dewse
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Dear Miss Dewse

Monitoring inspection of a school not in a category of concern of Smithills School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 23 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 took place because the school meets the monitoring threshold as set out in the [Monitoring Inspection Handbook](#).

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, I discussed with you, other senior leaders, the chair of the trust and other trustees, and a representative of the local authority 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, looked at examples of pupils' work, met with pupils and staff and reviewed a range of documentation. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but some aspects of the school need further improvement.

The school should take further action to:

- improve teachers' use of assessment strategies so that they can pinpoint precisely any gaps in pupils' understanding and purposefully reshape future learning to address pupils' misconceptions.

Main findings

There have been no significant changes in senior leadership or staffing since the previous inspection. A new reading and literacy leader was appointed during the previous academic year. In addition, two pedagogical leaders have been recently appointed in the mathematics and English departments.

Leaders and trustees have maintained a sharp focus on the areas for improvement that were identified in the previous inspection report. They regularly review the school's strengths and areas for development and they use this information to bring about swift and positive changes to the quality of education that pupils receive.

The school has raised staff's expectations of what pupils should know and be able to do. Subject leaders have taken effective action to improve their curriculums. For example, across curriculum areas, subject leaders have identified the important knowledge that pupils must learn and in which order this content should be taught. Disadvantaged pupils, and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are benefiting strongly from this work.

Improving the delivery of the curriculum continues to be high priority. The school is providing regular, research-informed training for staff. As a result, there is an increasingly secure understanding among staff about how to design learning activities that help pupils to retain important information over time. The school is working closely with subject leaders to develop consistency in how they check on the quality of the delivery of the curriculum in their subject areas.

Since the previous inspection, the school has taken decisive action to evaluate the effectiveness of its systems to check how well pupils are learning the curriculum. It has provided staff with research-based training about how to identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge quickly and with accuracy. As a result, most teachers are more confident in checking that pupils retain important subject content. However, the school recognises that its chosen assessment methods do not consistently support teachers to pinpoint where pupils' knowledge is not secure. In some instances, teachers still move on too quickly before pupils' essential knowledge is embedded. This is because some teachers do not use their checks on where pupils may still have gaps in their knowledge to reshape future learning activities. The school has appropriate plans in place to address this.

The school has made reading a high priority. It has worked successfully with external advisers to provide phonics training for all staff. This means that staff across the school, irrespective of their subject areas, are now better equipped to develop pupils' reading

knowledge in lessons. Pupils who find reading difficult, including those with SEND, are identified swiftly and accurately. They receive the tailored support that they need to catch up quickly. The school has revamped the library and invested in high-quality texts. This is encouraging pupils to read more widely and often. Some pupils spoke enthusiastically about the books that they read with their form tutors.

Trustees are committed to their work. They are maintaining an accurate oversight of the quality of education that the school provides to pupils. Relationships between trustees and leaders are positive and purposeful. Trustees are well informed about the school's development priorities and the progress now being made to achieve them.

The school values the support provided by external consultants. External support has been sought in relation to refining subject curriculums and evaluating the quality of curriculum delivery. Staff are valuing the opportunities to work collaboratively with the local authority partnership of schools to share ideas and expertise.

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

Yours sincerely

Kate Bowker
His Majesty's Inspector