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Mrs 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 of your school that took place on 25 January 2023, 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 have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in April 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior leaders, the 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, scrutinised behaviour data and met with the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator (SENDCo), a selection of teaching and non-teaching staff, and curriculum leaders from English and science. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Longfield Academy remains inadequate and has serious weaknesses. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Longfield Academy appointed a new headteacher shortly after the previous inspection. There have also been several changes to the school's local governing body. This includes a new chair of governors. The school has also appointed a new pastoral lead and SENDCo since the previous inspection. The school is currently responding to a cyber incident that has left them without access to some information and technology systems and data.

Leaders are taking effective action to improve pupils' behaviour at the school. There is a new focus on enabling pupils to make positive choices about behaviour. Pupils who are removed from lessons or suspended from school now receive more effective support. Leaders have implemented rigorous systems to monitor behaviour incidents and use this to inform their actions. This means that they can identify pupils and staff who may need additional support. Pupils' behaviour is improving and suspensions are reducing. Staff recognise the improvements in pupils' behaviour and now feel well supported by leaders. Pupils feel safe at school. Areas of the school where, previously, some pupils did not feel safe are now less of a concern to pupils. Leaders continue to focus on ensuring that the 'choices' policy is implemented consistently by all staff.

The new SENDCo has ensured that the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) register is accurate. This means that pupils with additional needs are now being identified more quickly. Leaders have thought carefully about the support they can offer pupils with SEND through the school's personalised learning centre. Teachers are provided with the information they need to support pupils effectively. This is starting to be used by teachers more consistently in order to support pupils in lessons. This has resulted in pupils making better progress through the curriculum and incidents of poorer behaviour being reduced. Leaders acknowledge that they are facing challenges with current staffing levels as the number of pupils who require additional support increases.

Leaders know there is more work to do to improve the quality of education. Leaders' own quality assurance shows that the implementation of the curriculum still varies. A new assessment policy has been introduced. Subject leaders can now use formal assessments at more appropriate times in the curriculum. In some subjects, such as English, this means leaders have a better understanding of how pupils are progressing through the curriculum. However, this approach is not consistent across the school.

Governance has been strengthened by new appointments to the local governing body. There is a link governor for key areas of the school, such as safeguarding, quality of education and SEND. Governors meet more regularly now and are presented with more useful information through a detailed headteacher's report. This allows governors to challenge leaders more effectively about the actions they are taking to improve the school. The local governing board communicates effectively with trustees to ensure that those responsible for governance are well informed about the school's progress.

Staff I spoke with during the inspection feel well supported by leaders. They feel that their well-being and workload is improving. Staff said the school is well led by the new headteacher and the senior leadership team. They feel leaders are clear about the actions they are taking and the reasons why they are needed to improve the school. One member of staff said, 'It feels like we are a team again.'

Leaders have sought the input of several external agencies to evaluate the effectiveness of their actions. For example, a review of specific curriculum areas clarified the actions that were required to bring about more rapid improvement. These evaluations have been

valuable for leaders to assess the impact of the work they have already carried out and identify additional areas for improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Swift Academies Multi-Academy 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