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Mr Dan Morrow
Principal
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Dear Mr Morrow

Special measures monitoring inspection of Oasis Academy Skinner Street

Following my visit with Mark Cole, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Judith Grevett, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 1–2 March 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March and April 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the interim executive committee, the Regional Academy Director, the Chief Executive of Oasis Academy Learning, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Medway Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Abigail Birch

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March and April 2015.

- Improve the quality of teaching, including in the early years, so that all pupils make good or better progress and standards rise, by ensuring that:
 - teachers set challenging and engaging work for all pupils, especially the most able
 - feedback to pupils clearly identifies what pupils need to do in order to improve their work
 - teachers consistently build pupils' ability to write in sentences and develop their vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling and handwriting skills
 - activities in early years are purposeful and clearly linked to developing children's skills
 - the teaching of phonics is more effective in building pupils' early reading skills.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by making sure that:
 - clear targets and measures for evaluating success are set in the academy's action plans
 - actions are taken regularly and thoroughly to confirm they are having a positive impact on standards
 - areas of weakness identified in teaching are followed up thoroughly to ensure they are eradicated quickly
 - leaders rapidly tackle poor attendance and persistent absenteeism with all the means available to them in order to improve outcomes for all pupils
 - the academy council and executive board challenge the academy's performance more rigorously and hold leaders firmly to account.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1–2 March 2016

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal, Regional Academy Director, Director of Monitoring Standards (Primary), Chair of the interim executive committee and members of the academy's senior and middle leadership team. The inspectors also met with members of staff. Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons and breaktimes and met with them more formally to gather their views. Teaching and learning were observed in 24 lessons and pupils' work in books was examined. Inspectors spoke to the Improvement Programme Manager and Schools Early Years Adviser for Medway Council, at the request of academy leaders. Inspectors took account of 38 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to a number of parents at the start and end of the day. Inspectors analysed a wide range of the academy's documentation. Inspectors also examined academy practices and procedures relating to how well pupils are cared for and kept safe.

Context

There have been substantial changes to leadership since the previous monitoring inspection in November 2015. One of the deputy principals and the assistant Principal left in December 2015. A new deputy Principal, responsible for English and raising the quality of teaching, has been transferred from Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey to add additional leadership capacity. Two members of staff have been appointed to provide additional support for pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding and to help pupils who are at risk of falling behind in their learning. Governance has been restructured and a new interim executive committee held their first meeting in February 2016. The number of pupils who attend the academy has continued to rise and there is now a waiting list for pupils to enter Reception. Leaders have continued the programme of redecoration and refurbishment of the academy's premises and outdoor environment.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have ambitious expectations with regard to improvement, including those relating to pupils' outcomes. Since the last visit academy leaders have worked in partnership with members of the trust to set more realistic targets relating to pupils' achievement and to ensure that these targets will result in the upward curve in outcomes that leaders are aiming for.

The capacity of leaders to facilitate change has been strengthened through the transfer of a new deputy Principal who has a proven track record in academy improvement and extensive subject knowledge in English. Already, progress in English has speeded up in Year 6 as a result of this additional expertise.

Middle leaders are beginning to grow in confidence to make a contribution to academy improvement. They participate in observing learning around the school, review pupils' work and talk to pupils about their learning. Senior leaders have dedicated time to their development by mentoring and coaching them in leadership skills and this is greatly valued by these emerging middle leaders. They share senior leaders' determination to transform the academy.

Systems to monitor the quality and impact of teaching have been strengthened. There is far more clarity now relating to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report and the focus of monitoring activities. However, improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains slow because there is a lack of clarity provided by leaders to teachers to help them fully understand what they must do to improve their own practice.

Partnerships with other schools in the local area are supporting developments in early years and in leadership and management. Academy leaders recognise the importance of building even greater links in order to share good practice and verify that teachers' judgements about how well pupils are achieving are correct.

The external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved has been completed. A national leader of education and the interim executive committee hold the Principal to account for how well this group of pupils are achieving. Leaders have instigated a new pupil premium plan that is responsive to pupils' need. Consequently, there are now pleasing signs that rates of progress for this group are improving.

Parents spoken to during this inspection were overwhelmingly supportive of the academy and feel improvements are clear. They are particularly complimentary about the Principal who they say is visible, accessible and approachable. Staff, too, say that they are valued and feel part of the academy's journey. The staff's desire to improve the academy for the pupils is unmistakable.

Academy leaders are beginning to evaluate all areas of the academy's provision. They have considered carefully the links between the 'nine habits' and fundamental British values. The Principal seeks ways to introduce these practically and in a meaningful way; for example through visits to a local Mosque and by studying migration through time.

Recent improvements to the structure of governance have been made. Since the last monitoring visit a new interim executive board has been established. This has further strengthened the skills of members to challenge and support academy leaders. The most recent review of all aspects of the academy undertaken by the Director of Monitoring Standards (Primary) in January 2016 was rigorous and realistic about strengths and weaknesses in provision.

During this visit, a small number of staff files were examined as part of wider checks on the academy's procedures for recruiting staff. This highlighted that references are not collected in a systematic way because the school does not keep accurate records about when and how information from referees is received. Leaders took instant remedial action to ensure that records held centrally were updated, and missing references for recent appointments have been requested. In addition, leaders have commissioned an immediate safeguarding audit to ensure that all procedures to keep pupils safe are impeccable. There are no wider concerns about the safety of pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There are encouraging signs that pupils are using more sophisticated vocabulary to write more complex sentences and have a greater awareness of the purpose of writing. This is particularly true for more-able pupils. More opportunities to verbally practise and share what they are going to write are helping pupils to formulate ideas. As a result, the quality and quantity of written work is improving and pupils demonstrate greater perseverance and stamina when working on their own. Currently, pupils do not consistently demonstrate this improvement across the full range of subjects in all year groups because they are not expected to do so all of the time. Therefore, opportunities are missed to embed these significant improvements across all areas of the curriculum.

There has been a positive shift in pupils' handwriting skills and presentation in both English and mathematics. This is because all staff consistently communicate high expectations and pupils are increasingly proud of the work they are producing, some of which is proudly displayed around the academy.

Noticeably, teachers and support staff are growing in confidence to capitalise on opportunities to practise and embed spelling, punctuation and grammar skills in a range of subjects, but this is not consistent across all classes. Furthermore, some staff are helping pupils to pronounce words correctly so that they are able to hear the sounds that letters make in order to spell words more accurately.

There are encouraging signs that pupils are able to underpin new learning by recalling what they already know and by making links in their learning across subjects. In a Year 5 history lesson pupils made links with their reading book, *Rooftoppers*, which is about the aftermath of the sinking of a Victorian liner, and the ill-fated ship R.M.S *Titanic*.

Staff are now more confident to use assessment information to identify individual pupils who require additional support to help prevent them from falling behind. However, they are less confident when planning lessons that accurately meet the needs of pupils within lessons. Consequently, expectations are not high enough in all classes or well matched to pupils' needs at the moment. Instructions are sometimes too complex and less-able pupils cannot access tasks because they do

not understand what they need to do. Overall, there is variability in the provision for more-able and less-able pupils, meaning that more-able pupils generally make more progress than their peers. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of pupils who are reaching the highest levels of attainment, especially in Key Stage 2. Therefore, less-able pupils are not making enough progress to reduce the gap between their current level of attainment and the levels expected for pupils of their age.

During this visit, support in lessons provided by additional adults had a positive effect on pupils' ability to successfully complete tasks. Extra support provided for pupils who are at risk of falling behind, known as interventions, is paying dividends. The majority of pupils who access them make progress as a result, especially in phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) and mathematics. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are supported well to improve. Recent improvements in the way that teachers share planning with additional support staff has helped to precisely target gaps in pupils' learning and has ensured that all staff are focused on stretching the more able. The new emphasis on using practical apparatus in mathematics is being used well to accelerate pupils' understanding and ability to solve problems.

Pupils have a growing understanding of how to improve their own learning because staff are giving them useful information about what is going well and what needs to be done to make learning even better. Additionally, pupils are editing their own work and discussing their work with peers to share ideas and consolidate their own understanding.

Relationships between staff and pupils are typically good. Because of this, pupils are more comfortable to try new tasks and they now say that they enjoy learning. This is particularly evident in Years 2, 5 and 6. In a science lesson seen during this inspection, a class teacher had a box perched on her head with 'What am I?' written on it. Pupils had to guess which type of material she was pretending to be, such as concrete or glass, by asking questions about the properties of the material, such as 'Are you flexible?' Pupils were having fun while learning.

Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent across year groups and across subjects. Teachers are developing a greater understanding of how to teach effective lessons but there are wide discrepancies in their ability to apply this knowledge at present. As a result, in some lessons, pupils are not clear about what they are learning and why.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Attendance is improving but remains stubbornly below the national average. More pupils are arriving on time and are ready to learn. Effective strategies are in place to improve attendance, including working in partnership with the local authority.

Although there are examples where pupils are fully engaged and motivated in lessons, there are too many occasions when pupils are not sufficiently focused because activities are not pitched at the right level to meet their needs. Hence, behaviour for learning continues to be fragile. Pupils' conduct behaviour is generally good in and around the academy because they are supported well by all staff who consistently communicate high expectations.

Pupils feel safe and nearly all parents agree that pupils are well cared for and nurtured because of the academy's sensitive approach to meeting pupils' needs. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and are taught how to understand risks within the school environment. They are given responsibility to care for one another.

Pupils talk positively about the quality of interventions and teaching they receive. They have a mature understanding and appreciation of the commitment the academy shows them as individuals. As a result, they have emerging aspirations to do well which the academy supports in a range of ways, such as facilitating visits to Oxford University.

Staff are helping pupils to develop their social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. The 'nine habits' are becoming embedded within the academy's culture. Staff feel that these have made a significant difference to pupils' understanding of important values such as honesty, forgiveness and patience.

Outcomes for pupils

Academy leaders are predicting that pupils' outcomes at the end of each key stage will improve in 2016, including how well pupils achieve in the Year 1 phonics screening test. This is based on leaders' analysis of performance information.

Current performance information shows a sizeable improvement in the rates of progress achieved by pupils in a range of subjects. This is especially true for upper Key Stage 2 where progress in reading, writing and mathematics is well above expected levels. This is helping pupils to reach expected levels of attainment for pupils of their age. However, this gap remains significant, especially in Year 4 and Year 6. Leaders have certainly not been complacent in trying to reduce this deficit in pupils' knowledge and skills. Additional booster sessions have recently commenced and the academy is now open on Saturday mornings to older pupils. A high number of pupils attend these sessions voluntarily. However, rates of progress are not high enough across all subjects and all year groups to bring about a rapid rise in standards throughout the academy.

Pupils who are eligible for support through pupil premium funding are making progress that is at least equal to their peers in most areas. They sometimes make greater progress than other pupils in the school, particularly in mathematics, which, importantly, is helping them to close gaps in achievement between themselves and others.

The academy has a clear focus on developing early reading skills and therefore pupils are increasingly able to articulate and apply the sounds that letters make to help them read confidently and attempt to spell words more accurately. There is a growing culture of reading for enjoyment across all age groups and pupils are being inspired to read. Since the last monitoring visit a new reading project has been introduced and this is having a significant impact on pupils' ability to understand text and talk about a wide variety of literature. The project is based on teaching English through the use of high-quality books and creative teaching approaches, such as art and drama. In turn, this is improving pupils' vocabulary.

There is growing evidence in pupils' work that pupils are writing in a way that is enjoyable to the reader. This is a huge leap forward because it demonstrates that pupils are able to apply what they are learning. In spite of this, opportunities to develop pupils' writing are not always grasped across all subjects and therefore pupils do not make as much progress as they could.

The proportion of children predicted to reach the standards expected for their age at the end of the early years is expected to rise. This is based on the academy's current assessment of children's ability across all areas of learning. Yet, these predictions are not based on substantial evidence and therefore assessments about how well children are doing are unconvincing. Academy leaders recognise this weakness and are taking action to secure their judgements relating to children's progress and achievement in the early years.

External support

Oasis Academy Learning articulate increasing confidence in the Principal's ability to forge improvement. This assurance is based upon their own thorough evaluation of the academy's work. Oasis Community Learning is strengthening their capacity to support the academy by appointing an additional Regional Academy Director with expertise in primary education who will support the academy to improve.

The local authority is supporting the academy to write a focused early years action plan to provide children with increasingly interesting and imaginative ways to develop their engagement in all areas of learning. Already, notable improvements have been made to the early years environment to ensure that children's learning is more absorbing.