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Mr J Barrett
Acting Headteacher
The Dean Academy
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Dear Mr Barrett

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Dean Academy

Following my visit with Gillian Carter and Duncan Millard, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 4 and 5 May 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 school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2015.

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.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chief executive officer of the Athelstan Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in October 2015.

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use information about what pupils can and cannot do to plan learning that is sufficiently challenging
 - effectively question pupils, so as to assess, probe and deepen their learning
 - demand the highest standards of presentation of pupils' work
 - provide pupils with high-quality feedback to enable them to improve their work
 - learn from the practice of the most effective teachers at the academy.
- Urgently improve pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - teachers raise their expectations of what pupils are able to achieve
 - all pupils, and especially the most able, are challenged to think more deeply about their learning
 - the individual needs of disadvantaged and disabled pupils, and those with special educational needs, are well known to ensure that they receive highly effective personalised support.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - governors robustly holding leaders at all levels to account for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and for pupils' outcomes
 - leaders, including subject leaders, rigorously monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the areas they lead, in order to determine what works well and why
 - ensuring that pupils receive effective careers education, advice and guidance.

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 first monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 May 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the chief executive officer of the Athelstan Trust, other senior leaders, subject leaders and groups of pupils and held a telephone conversation with the chair of the local governing body. The monitoring HMI also met with the new headteacher who has not yet taken up the post. Inspectors visited classrooms with senior leaders to look at pupils' work and talk with them about it. They also looked at further samples of pupils' work.

Context

The current acting headteacher is seconded from his post as a deputy headteacher within the Athelstan Trust and took up post in September 2015, just before the inspection in October 2015. A new headteacher has been appointed to take up post from September 2016. The current acting headteacher will continue to provide support to the school on two days each week. The chief executive officer of the trust also supports the school for about one day each week and will continue to do so next year.

A number of subject leaders and teachers from Malmesbury School, the lead school in the trust, are seconded to teach in the school. This will continue next year. There have been other significant staff changes, and a series of new appointments, including in senior leadership, have been made for September.

The chair of the local governing body has been seconded to this role for two years, starting around the time of the October inspection. The local governing body now has 12 members, a significant increase since the October inspection, to give a much greater breadth and depth of expertise.

The trust also provides expertise and support to ensure that the school is on a secure financial footing.

The school leaders have also made changes to the arrangements for internal exclusion and to the student services centre to provide support for vulnerable pupils and those at risk of exclusion.

The school continues to run the on-site Epic Centre, which is provision for about 10 pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

School leaders and the chair of governors have an accurate understanding of where

the school was, where it is now and what needs to be improved. The actions they have already taken provide a secure basis for more rapid improvement, particularly when the planned changes are made in September 2016, even though the full impact of these actions is not clear yet. They also understand that the gradual pace of improvement over the time since the October 2015 inspection needs to speed up and a greater sense of urgency is needed to meet the trust and school leaders' ambitious targets. Teachers and pupils report that the school is a calmer, happier and more open place to teach and learn. Leaders' constant emphasis on the school's core values is beginning to establish a more positive ethos. The basic systems and procedures required to enable the school to run smoothly have been introduced.

The school action plan accurately identifies what needs to improve and the actions that are required. While the plan itself does not clearly indicate how the impact of these actions on the outcomes for pupils will be monitored and evaluated, a detailed evaluation is undertaken frequently by the senior leaders, led by the acting headteacher, and challenged by the trust. However, the lack of an explicit focus means that the need to evaluate actions in terms of their impact on pupils' attendance, behaviour and achievement does not permeate the school.

The trust, school leaders and the chair of governors are absolutely clear that the keys to the success of the school are improving the overall quality of teaching and addressing many pupils' poor attitudes that lead to unacceptable behaviour. A complete change in the culture of the school is essential to making these improvements and this is beginning to happen.

Progress has been made in improving teaching. There is a much more open and collaborative culture that enables teachers to work together and learn from the best, within subject areas and across the school. There are pockets of good teaching and key subjects have been supported well by seconding teachers from within the Athelstan Trust. However, the extent of this good teaching has not yet reached 'the critical mass' needed to secure the rapid improvement required. There is currently too much inconsistency so that the efforts of the better teachers are sometimes undermined by others setting too low expectations for pupils' work and behaviour. Pupils are very open about how weaknesses in teaching often lead to their poor behaviour.

There have been improvements in pupils' behaviour. The use of the internal exclusion and student services areas, and the skills and expertise of the staff there, have had a marked impact on reducing the number of serious incidents. Internal truancy during the school day is much reduced and almost eliminated. Work to help those pupils who spend much of their time in student services return to lessons is starting to be effective. However, low-level disruption continues to be a problem in too many lessons. Senior leaders are fully aware that there needs to be a major shift in many pupils' attitudes so that they take more responsibility for their own behaviour and show more respect for each other and for adults. They know that

this will not be achieved quickly, but good progress has already been made since the start of this school year and many teachers and pupils are positive that 'the corner has been turned'.

Senior leaders' tracking of pupils' overall progress is much sharper and more reliable. This enables them to put in place effective support for individual and groups of pupils falling behind across a range of subjects. Tracking pupils' progress in individual subjects is the responsibility of the seven directors of faculty. Each faculty has its own system for recording and monitoring pupils' progress and achievement. Timetabled weekly 'learning walks' and checking samples of pupils' work enables the directors to monitor pupils' progress and the quality of teaching in the subjects in their faculty. However, at this stage senior leaders do not have robust arrangements for ensuring that all directors do this well and to provide further targeted support and training where necessary. The directors have not been trained well in making the best use of observations of learning and the scrutiny of pupils' work. While the school leaders and directors of faculty focus strongly on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils (those entitled to support through pupil premium funding), there is less focus on other groups, such as the most able, or on differences in achievement between boys and girls.

The secondment of a highly experienced national leader of governance to chair the local governing body meant that an external review of governance was unnecessary. The local governing body is very well led by the seconded chair. The governing body has a much-improved breadth and depth of expertise. The chair is training governors individually and collectively to ensure that they have the skills to provide the right balance of support and challenge to the school's leaders. The focus on improving pupils' behaviour has led to much recent work being focused on disciplinary panels and the need to train governors to do this.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the use of pupil premium funding was a significant concern at the time of the October 2015 inspection. An external review was undertaken but, by the time the report was received, the school and trust leaders had already taken actions to dramatically improve this situation. The report offered little that had not already been acted upon. The acting headteacher, and other leaders, regularly evaluate the difference that specific actions taken have had on the attendance and achievement of pupils supported by the pupil premium.

Careers guidance is much improved. Discussions were held with a large number of current Year 11 pupils. All were clear about their plans for post-16 courses and the options they had considered. The guidance they were given was thorough and impartial. Across the group of pupils, their plans covered all possible post-16 providers within a reasonable distance. The choice each pupil has made is well informed and appropriate.

The arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements. Improvements in behaviour around the school mean that it is safer and pupils feel much more secure. Pupils adopt safe working practices in practical subjects and in physical education lessons.

The use of the internal exclusion unit and the student services centre means that the school's leaders are aware of where pupils are at all times of the school day; this is much improved.

I recommend that the school can appoint newly qualified teachers where senior leaders and the trust are fully confident that they will be supported well in the faculty and subject.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching across the school and within key subjects is still too inconsistent, although it has improved since the inspection in October 2015. Given the school leaders' plan to improve teaching by modelling and sharing good practice, it is reassuring that there are pockets of good teaching in the school, such as in history, languages, values and society, and in engineering. There is some good teaching in English, mathematics and science, but much that is not good enough. Weak teaching is still typically marked by low expectations for pupils' work and behaviour and by pupils responding poorly and disrupting the learning of others. In these classes, the quality of pupils' work is too low and does not show enough progress.

Since the October inspection, school leaders have focused on improving the quality of teachers' planning. This has been successful in ensuring that all lessons have clear success criteria: the learning that is expected. However, the quality of these lessons is still too variable and too many lack clarity and challenge or do not translate into improvements in pupils' learning and progress. Leaders know this and are working with individuals and groups of teachers to translate improved planning into better lessons, supported by staff from the trust and from a teaching school alliance.

There is now widespread understanding across the school that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils needs to improve significantly. A wide range of targeted support for individual and groups of pupils, mainly those in Year 11, in English and mathematics, and some other subjects, is having an impact for those pupils who receive this and in those subjects. Leaders know that to make this more sustainable and benefit more pupils, improvements in the overall quality of teaching across the school are needed. When the teacher's expectations are high, disadvantaged and others pupils make good progress, but this good practice is limited. Teachers now know who these pupils are and include them in their planning. The impact of this on raising their achievement is currently not effective or widespread enough.

The attention being given to raising the achievement of the most-able pupils is widely variable across subjects. The most able in each class are not being challenged to do as well as they can in many lessons. Those in top sets generally make better progress, but even in these classes some could achieve much more.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Overall, pupils' behaviour has improved. While teachers and pupils recognise that more needs to be done, they are positive that the right actions are being taken and are starting to make a difference. Incidents of serious poor behaviour are much reduced. There is a much clearer understanding of what is acceptable behaviour and what is not.

Two concerns are limiting the pace of improvement. First, there is inconsistency in the expectations teachers have for pupils' behaviour. The low expectations set by some teachers and the lack of basic classroom routines undermines the good work of others. Second, some pupils still do not accept that they need to take much more responsibility for their own behaviour; they cannot continue to blame teachers. Senior leaders are absolutely clear that both need to be addressed and the actions they are taking are having an impact. There is an effective blend of short- and longer-term actions. Exclusions of pupils for fixed periods of time have increased as the leaders tackle the problems. Leaders are also working on developing pupils' resilience so that they can cope better with situations they find difficult.

Many pupils in the school are delightful and a pleasure to talk to. They are very open and honest and many admit that they do not behave as well as they should because they become bored too easily. At break and lunchtimes and at lesson changeovers the school is calm and well ordered. Pupils move with a sense of purpose and arrive at lessons on time, although not all are ready to start to learn.

Teachers have been equipped with better skills to manage poor behaviour in lessons. This has led to improvements in many lessons, but not all. Poor behaviour by some pupils inhibits the learning of others in too many lessons. The school's current system of grouping pupils by overall ability, soon to be changed, leads to pupils being in the same groups throughout the day. This exacerbates the poor relationships between some pupils, particularly in the lower ability teaching groups. Where the effectiveness of teaching has improved and pupils are more involved in their learning and finding it more interesting, behaviour has improved markedly. The school's approach is working, but teaching needs to improve more rapidly to secure the improvements in behaviour required.

Attendance has improved overall, for all year groups and for all groups of pupils. Although the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and some pupils with special education needs or disability is below the national average, it has improved significantly since the same point last year.

Outcomes for pupils

The quality of current pupils' work is still too widely variable, overall and for groups of pupils. At this stage, it is possible to see some impact of the actions leaders have

taken to improve pupils' achievement, but these are not yet embedded across the school. The quality and level of pupils' work in English, mathematics and science is inconsistent and not good enough in some classes. Too much teaching does not make sufficient use of the information teachers have about their pupils to make sure that all groups make the progress they are capable of. Where teaching has improved or good quality has been sustained, such as in history, languages, values and society, and in engineering, pupils' achievement, including for different groups of pupils, is rising. In those curriculum areas where there has been a focus on building improvements from the younger year groups, such as in the world affairs faculty, this is having an impact on raising achievement.

The school leaders' evaluations, supported by the quality of the work seen, indicate that more current Year 11 pupils than in 2015 will achieve their targets and overall achievement will rise, particularly in English. However, the gap in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others will not close significantly. Improvements in pupils' work in other years groups are patchy and are highly dependent on the quality of teaching. The quality of the work of the most-able pupils is still too often not high enough. These pupils are not achieving their potential. Pupils with special educational needs or disability are making more progress as a result of improvements in the quality of the provision and good leadership.

Previous actions to improve the literacy skills of many pupils who enter the school in Year 7 with poor reading and writing skills have not been effective. Too many pupils currently in Year 8 and 9 find it difficult to show what they have learned because their writing skills are poor or they do not fully understand what they are expected to do because their reading skills are not good enough. A new scheme has been introduced to deal with this, but it is too early for it to have shown an impact.

External support

The school receives extensive support from the Athelstan Trust. This is effective in supporting and developing senior and subject leadership and in raising the quality of teaching. The support is sharply focused on the areas that require the most and the most rapid improvement. The trust also provides very helpful administrative support. The support from the trust has been essential in making sure that all of the basic systems and procedures required to enable the school to run smoothly are in place. The support from the trust has been handled sensitively so that staff morale has improved, the fear of failure has been removed and a much more open culture has been established.

Through the trust, the school has received high-quality training from the Avon Teaching School Alliance. This has been targeted well at those teachers and subjects that need it most, and which are willing and able to improve, as well as training for the whole staff.

By the time of the second monitoring visit, it is expected that:

- all actions taken by senior and curriculum leaders are evaluated through the impact on the outcomes for pupils and for specific groups of pupils, such as those supported by the pupil premium, the most able and those with special educational needs or disability
- as a result of further improvements in teaching, pupils' work, including for different groups of pupils, shows many more making much better progress and producing work at the level and quality expected so that good progress is the norm rather than the exception
- the improvements secured in teachers' planning are translated into better learning in lessons
- fewer lessons suffer from pupils disrupting the learning of others and pupils are taking more responsibility for their own behaviour
- the reading and writing skills of those pupils currently with low levels has improved to enable them to take a more active part in lessons
- arrangements are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of faculty directors and provide them with any training they require to undertake their role effectively.