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Mr Tom Beveridge
Head of School
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Dear Mr Beveridge

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Dean Academy

Following my visit with Non Davies and Deirdre Fitzpatrick, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 15 and 16 November 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 previous monitoring inspection. Please also pass my thanks on to the pupils, staff and governors we met during the inspection.

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

The school's improvement 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 chief executive officer and the chair of the board of directors of the Athelstan Trust, the chair of the local governing body, 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 school.
- 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 school'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 15 and 16 November 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Athelstan Trust, other senior leaders, faculty leaders and groups of pupils. The monitoring Her Majesty's Inspector met the director of the Athelstan Trust, and the chair and two other members of the local governing body. Inspectors visited classrooms with senior and curriculum leaders to look at pupils' work and talk with them about it. They also observed an assembly and visited morning tutorial sessions to talk to pupils. Informal conversations were held with a large number of pupils during break and lunchtime. Inspectors listened to some pupils read in lessons.

Context

The Dean Academy is sponsored by the Athelstan Trust.

The headteacher took up the post on 1 September 2016. At that time there were other key changes to the senior leadership: the previous acting headteacher is now the executive headteacher and works in the school two days each week; a previous assistant headteacher is acting deputy headteacher; and a new assistant headteacher took up post. The CEO of the Athelstan Trust continues to support the school and is on-site at least one day each week.

The chair of the local governing body, a national leader of governance, continues to be seconded to this role. The local governing body now has 14 members – a significant increase since the October inspection, to give a much greater breadth and depth of expertise. An audit led to identifying the need to take on a small number of additional governors and this is well in hand.

A number of subject leaders and teachers from Malmesbury School, the lead school in the trust, are still seconded to teach and/or provide support in the school.

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

The school leaders have also strengthened the arrangements for internal exclusion and the student services centre to provide support for vulnerable pupils and those at risk of exclusion that were in place at the time of the first monitoring visit.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Significant overall progress has been made since the October 2015 inspection that placed the school in special measures and since the first monitoring visit in May 2016. There are clear signs of improvement in all the areas identified in the letter following that visit. The pace of improvement has increased noticeably since the visit in May.

The culture of the school has improved significantly. The school is much calmer and the atmosphere more purposeful. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are markedly better; they move promptly between lessons and at the end of break and lunchtime and arrive ready to learn. The effective use of the on-site alternative provision and the student support centre, a sanctuary that helps some pupils to settle and prepare for their learning, makes a significant contribution to this calmer atmosphere. Leaders have been effective in shifting pupils' attitudes to accept that they must take responsibility for their behaviour and learning. Although this is not yet fully embedded across the school, it has been significantly developed since the previous visit. Staff morale is much higher. There is a greater feeling of confidence, sharing and openness and much more collaborative working. Senior leaders and governors have worked hard to successfully restore the place of the school in the local community.

The pace of these improvements is testament to the work of the trust, the new headteacher, the strengths and complementary skills of the senior leadership team, and the support and challenge now provided by the local governing body. The chair has been very successful in building up the governing body to have a good range of expertise and depth of understanding. The overall governance provided by the trust and the local governing body is now strong, from being a significant weakness at the time of the October 2015 inspection, and is effective in holding senior leaders to account.

A key element in securing these improvements is the precision in the identification of what has worked well, and is working well, and where further improvement is needed. The 2016 examination results did not show the improvements expected. School leaders undertook a meticulous analysis of these results and the lessons learned are already being applied; for example, to raise pupils' achievement in mathematics and provide targeted support in other curriculum areas. The new assessment arrangements enable senior and curriculum leaders (faculty directors) to undertake a precise diagnostic assessment of what pupils can and cannot do. This leads to better-targeted interventions and support for pupils and teachers. Senior leaders meet together, and with curriculum leaders, frequently to monitor and review pupils' progress. Heads of year bring a good depth of understanding of individual pupils to these reviews. A lot of work is being undertaken to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information about pupils' progress and achievement that informs these reviews; this is already having a positive impact. Senior leaders and curriculum leaders evaluate the effectiveness of the actions arising from these

reviews rigorously.

Senior leaders fully recognise the need to ensure that pupils currently in Year 11 achieve better results at the end of year. However, their main focus is to build sustained and embedded improvements in the quality of teaching for all pupils from Year 7 to 11. The pockets of strong teaching seen at the time of the May 2016 visit have been extended to cover a wider range of subjects. The extent of this better teaching is starting to have a positive impact in reducing the inconsistency in the quality of teaching in some curriculum areas, including in the science, performance and world affairs faculties. Senior leaders know exactly where teaching needs to improve and that, overall, teaching is still not good enough. They know that, while there have been clear improvements in some subjects such as English, much more needs to be done to raise the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in mathematics.

At the start of this academic year, senior leaders undertook an intensive programme of observations in lessons and checks of pupils' work to determine strengths and areas for development. This resulted in the 'Dean lesson' framework that outlines clearly what good teaching and learning should look like. It lays out clear expectations for teaching and has been instrumental in raising the quality. The framework is supported well by an extensive, but well-focused, programme of professional development for all teachers. The effective use of individual coaching is making a difference for those teachers and curriculum leaders that need this more intensive support. It is encouraging that teachers accept that aspects of their work need to improve and that they are both able and willing to make this happen. This reflects the much-improved culture and positive atmosphere in the school.

As a result of better teaching, pupils generally are making more progress, although this is still variable and dependent on the quality of teaching. There is a lag between the improvements in teaching and the impact on pupils' progress, but overall pupils' progress and achievement are improving. Those pupils that receive additional support, such as those who are disadvantaged, make better progress as a result. Pupils in the Epic Centre mostly do well as a result of the quality of leadership and provision in the centre. Overall, however, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make enough progress. This has not improved in line with other groups of pupils because of weaknesses in the leadership of the provision for these pupils. The leader knows individual pupils and their particular needs very well. However, the tracking of their progress and the analysis of assessment information are not robust enough to effectively plan and evaluate the impact of support and interventions. These findings agree with the school's recent external review of the provision for these pupils.

Senior leaders have introduced a more robust process of faculty reviews. The role of curriculum leaders as 'leaders of teaching' is much more widely understood and is becoming more effective. Senior leaders know that there is still work to be done in some areas and that this is key to securing further improvements in teaching.

Curriculum leaders are much clearer about the need for them to develop a shared understanding of what good teaching and learning in their subjects look like. Much more is being done to reliably and accurately track pupils' progress and intervene as necessary to support pupils and teachers. Some faculty leaders are providing more effective coaching and support for some teachers in their faculty. The 'triad' approach, with two faculty leaders working with a senior leader, is highly valued and effective in sharing good practice and working together on common concerns.

Senior leaders and curriculum leaders undertake frequent observations in lessons and checks of pupils' work. There is a sharply focused set of questions to be addressed during these observations that start with an evaluation of the quality of pupils' work and the progress they are making, including specific groups of pupils. The records of observation undertaken by senior leaders do not focus sufficiently on an evaluation of the quality of pupils' work and progress to model best practice for faculty leaders.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and well suited to the needs of pupils. Destinations information shows that pupils are generally prepared well for their next steps, although senior leaders fully recognise that previous low achievement in English and mathematics is an impediment to some pupils' progression to higher-level courses.

Governors ensure that the arrangements for safeguarding meet all requirements and are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The overall quality of teaching has improved. There is strong teaching in a wider range of subjects, including English, science, history, religious education and citizenship, physical education, languages and the practical subjects of carpentry, engineering, and hair and beauty. There is still too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching in the science, performance and world affairs faculties. The quality of teaching is much improved in English, but much in mathematics is still not good enough.

The 'Dean lesson' provides a good framework for planning and teaching and has been key to the improvements in the overall quality of teaching. It covers the important features of good teaching and learning. Some parts of the framework are being consistently applied, but with some variability in quality. Where teaching is strong, the various elements of the framework are undertaken well and learning is secure. Good attention is given to the progress of different groups of pupils, including those with different starting points and those who are disadvantaged. Where teaching is weaker, although the elements are in place they are not used well or are too superficial. Learning is insecure and the needs of different groups are not catered for well.

Most lessons have clear objectives, although they are often not differentiated to show how the needs of pupils at different levels have been considered carefully. Few have clear success criteria; this makes it difficult to see how teachers will know if the learning has been effective.

Where appropriate, all lessons begin with 'do now' tasks so that they get off to a good start and set pupils up for the learning to follow. Teachers are making more use of questioning to involve pupils in the lesson. However, these are often not directed to individuals to ensure that a range of pupils are involved in the discussions. Other pupils are rarely invited to develop or comment on the responses to probe and deepen learning effectively.

There are three areas included in the 'Dean lesson' where practice needs to be more consistently at a higher level. In all of these, there are examples of strong practice that can be built on.

First, planning and teaching need to take more account of the range of ability and different rates of progress in the class to ensure that all pupils are challenged to do as well as they can. Second, teachers need to make sure that pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve, in lessons and when providing feedback to them on their work. Some teachers give pupils time in later lessons to work on these improvements and to enable them to see that it is making a difference. This is not yet consistent across all classes. Third, teachers need to be more aware of when pupils' poor reading and/or writing skills prevent pupils from taking a full part in the lesson or not being able to write well enough to show their understanding. While school-wide interventions and support have improved pupils' reading and writing skills, some subject teachers are not aware enough of the implications of low skill levels for the pupils they are teaching. Work has been undertaken in science using an analysis of pupils' attainment in cognitive ability tests compared with their performance in science tests. This identified that the fewer gains for those with low prior attainment could be a result of weaker skills in reading and writing and the need to address these through subject teaching. This effective approach is not yet used more widely.

A noticeable improvement since the last visit is the amount of pupils' own work in their books. This makes it possible to see the progress they are making, for example, through the use of extended writing in history and pupils writing about their own ideas and understanding in science. However, this is not well established in all classes. For example, pupils in a lower prior attainment Year 9 group in science produced longer and higher-quality paragraphs when writing about their understanding of particles and showed a greater depth of understanding than a higher-ability group, as a result of the teacher's much higher expectations.

The quality of teaching in mathematics must improve significantly to raise pupils' achievement. Pupils receive too little good-quality feedback on their work to know how well they are doing or how to improve. When feedback is provided, it has

insufficient challenge for that pupil. Much teaching in mathematics focuses on showing and applying a method without developing a deeper understanding of the mathematical concepts. As a result, learning is fragile and pupils cannot explain the topics they completed recently. Key topics are not revisited enough to develop learning further and provide the understanding needed for pupils to successfully answer questions in tests and examinations.

The teaching and support for pupils in the Epic Centre lead to them making good progress. This is consistent with the findings of the previous visit in May. However, those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make enough progress in lessons. They are not supported well and teaching assistants are not used effectively. In some cases, teachers assume that the teaching assistant is providing the necessary support and do not check these pupils' progress or give them help.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

There have been marked and sustained improvements in pupils' attitudes and behaviour since the October 2015 inspection and since the previous monitoring visit in May 2016. Pupils behave safely and sensibly around the school site. They are polite and respectful and, as noted in the previous letter, a pleasure to meet and talk to. They want to make the school a better place and are clear about its importance in the local community. They welcome and understand the need for them to take responsibility for their own behaviour and learning, although many are still developing the skills to do this successfully. This is a huge change in the culture of the school.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is very much improved. Pupils respond well to good teaching. When teaching is less motivating, they still do what is expected of them. Most would welcome more challenge to help them become more involved in the lesson. The new 'rewards and consequences' system is already working well. The number of incidents of poor behaviour in lessons, even at the lowest level, has reduced. Pupils are very positive about the much better clarity and the consistent application of consequences, the use of rewards and about teachers' contact with their parents. This new system has made, and is making, a significant contribution to pupils' much improved behaviour.

The on-site alternative provision centre caters for the needs of a small number of pupils who are at risk of being excluded from the school. There has been a significant reduction in the number of pupils excluded for fixed periods or permanently so that these are now low. Pupils are now more effectively re-integrated back into lessons in the main school. Those in the centre receive more specialist teaching and the academic progress of these pupils is checked frequently to help them move back into lessons. Many pupils are very positive about how the use of this provision has contributed to the overall increased calmness around the school.

The school's student services centre is used well for a small number of pupils who need some quiet or 'calming down' time or support to be able to cope in lessons. Pupils see it as more of 'a sanctuary' than an isolation or exclusion unit. The use of the centre is monitored carefully to ensure that it is used as intended. The staff in the centre work well and successfully to support these vulnerable pupils and help them take a full part in lessons.

Pupils' more positive attitudes and enjoyment of school have led to more attending the school regularly. Pupils' attendance overall and for most groups has improved since the same period last year. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved at a faster rate than that overall. Boys' attendance has improved more than girls but both are now above the latest national averages. Intense support has improved the attendance of the small minority of pupils whose attendance was consistently poor. The attendance of those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is still too low. Leaders continue to apply concerted efforts to improve attendance further and every leader and teacher has a performance target to raise attendance.

School leaders pay good attention to the all-round development of pupils. Pupils are safe and well looked after. There is an effective programme for their personal development. Pupils are clear about what they need to do to keep themselves safe and what to do if they have any concerns. They have good opportunities, not least through their work on values, ethics and citizenship, to discuss a range of aspects of life in modern Britain and develop their understanding of values, rights and responsibilities.

Outcomes for pupils

The examination results in 2016 did not show the improvements that the senior leaders expected. Overall attainment did not improve. There were some improvements in English but not in mathematics. Overall achievement was low.

As a result of improvements in the quality of teaching, current pupils in all year groups are making stronger progress in a range of subjects. However, there is still too much variability across subjects and within some curriculum areas. The improvements noted in English have been sustained so that pupils in all year groups make strong progress in most English classes. Strong progress was also seen in pupils' work in a range of subjects including science, history, modern foreign languages and religious education/citizenship. However, pupils' progress is weaker in other classes and in other subjects. This is often because the level of challenge, including for the most able pupils, is too low and those pupils falling behind are not supported well to catch up. Pupils in the practical subjects make good progress and are prepared well for higher-level courses or apprenticeships. Pupils' progress in mathematics remains weak for all years and groups.

The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is now improving more rapidly than for

other pupils. This is mainly a result of the additional support they receive in, for example, the extensive and intensive work on improving their reading and writing skills. In lessons, these pupils are often not identified by teachers to check their learning and challenge them to do better. Some disadvantaged pupils show the potential to achieve at a higher level than their prior achievement suggests. This is being picked up well by the testing arrangements senior leaders have introduced, but not recognised by class teachers.

Those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make enough progress in lessons. Their overall achievement is too low. The attendance of these pupils is much lower than for others in the school and a higher proportion are excluded.

External support

The school receives extensive high-quality support from the Athelstan Trust. This is effective in developing senior and curriculum leadership and in raising the quality of teaching. Frequent rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the impact mean that the support is sharply focused on the areas that require the most, and the most rapid, improvement.

The support for the new headteacher, and the new senior leadership team, from the trust's chief executive and the executive headteacher have been invaluable in building a strong team with a very good set of complementary skills.

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. The training has led to improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

The chair of the local governing body, a national leader of governance, was seconded by the trust. She is supported well by the trust's board of directors. As a consequence of this appointment, the effectiveness of governance has improved enormously since the October 2015 inspection.

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

- there are marked improvements in the quality of teaching in mathematics so that pupils receive clear feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, leading to more rapid progress and secure learning
- teachers consistently apply all aspects of the 'Dean lesson' framework at a higher level
- improvements are made to the leadership of the provision for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so that they are supported to make more progress in lessons.