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Mrs Helen Round
Principal
Oasis Academy Fir Vale
Owler Lane
Fir Vale
Sheffield
S4 8GA

Dear Mrs Round

Special measures monitoring inspection of Oasis Academy Fir Vale

Following my visit with Maria Butler, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 18–19 January 2017, 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.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2016. 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 school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sheffield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Lunn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2016.

- Urgently secure effective leadership at all levels with the skills and expertise to:
 - rapidly improve the quality of teaching
 - improve pupils' behaviour, minimise the impact of poor behaviour on pupils' learning and ensure that all pupils feel happy and safe in school
 - improve attendance, ensuring that pupils attend regularly and on time in order to provide consistency and continuity in their learning.
- Improve the quality of teaching to secure good or better progress for all pupils by:
 - ensuring that teachers assess pupils' work accurately, plan lessons that build upon and extend pupils' prior learning effectively, and provide the right level of challenge and support for pupils
 - making sure that teachers plan for and direct the work of teaching assistants effectively
 - developing teachers' subject knowledge so that the basic skills of communication and language, reading, writing and mathematics are taught well
 - improving the teaching of phonics to enable younger pupils to speak, read and write with greater confidence
 - developing a language-rich environment which allows pupils to immerse themselves in spoken and written language.
- Ensure that the youngest children get off to the best possible start by improving the cohesion and consistency of planning, teaching, assessment and use of resources in the early years.

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 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 18–19 January 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They met with the principal, deputy principal, middle leaders, support staff, groups of pupils, parents and carers, a representative from the academy council and the regional academy director. Senior leaders carried out joint observations with the inspectors across the school.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, one member of teaching staff has left the school and one temporary teacher has joined. The number of pupils on roll has increased to over 300. From mid-September, 62 pupils have joined the school, on average 20 in each key stage, and 38 pupils have left. Five pupils have started and since left the school during that period. The vast majority of pupils joining the school are new to English and have not received any schooling prior to starting. The school continues to work in exceptionally challenging circumstances.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal and deputy-principal provide strong leadership. They have a clear vision through which they drive improvements across the school. Continued professional development for the increasingly stable staff team is beginning to impact positively on the quality of teaching. Leaders have now created pockets of strong teaching, learning and assessment which are helping to raise expectations across the key stages.

The principal's decision to base the vice-principal in Year 6 to provide a strong model of what high-quality teaching, learning and assessment looks like is already having impact. This enables all staff to observe good practice within their own school, demonstrating that pupils can concentrate, work independently, achieve and have their wide-ranging learning needs successfully catered for. This allows teachers to reflect on their own practice and emulate the high expectations they have seen. Similarly, strong practice within Year 2 sets higher standards across key stage 1.

Middle leadership is improving. The leadership of phonics and mathematics is stronger because leaders are more experienced and have a clear vision for their subjects. The leadership of other key areas is not as well established, and relatively inexperienced teachers are receiving training to support them in their new roles. Leaders are monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their subject areas. The mathematics leader has observed all teachers and, where she noted particular areas that were weaker, worked alongside staff, revisiting them to check that they were implementing the identified improvements. However, some leaders are not using the information effectively to measure impact. For example, a

special educational needs intervention widely used across the school showed limited impact.

Senior leaders have a realistic view of what teaching looks like across the school. They recognise where strengths and weaknesses are and know how to move forward. Regular observations show specific improvements for some teachers, and where improvements are less noticeable, leaders carry out weekly observations and coaching to support these teachers to develop more quickly. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers are still in the early stages of improving their skills to enable pupils to make the accelerated progress they need. Where teaching is strongest, pupils are progressing well, with a higher proportion in line to reach the expected standard. Regular training and coaching focus on improving learning outcomes for pupils. Learning behaviours are improving, and although there are a few classes where behaviour is more challenging, teachers now have a climate in which they can teach.

In mathematics, strong planning enables teachers to teach across all ability levels. Teachers are using prior assessment information well. Pupils show higher levels of engagement because lessons motivate and interest them. Teachers are focusing on ensuring that pupils learn basic skills to help them catch up. Younger pupils learn songs and jingles to help them remember facts. Older pupils work together to support each other and benefit from planned paired activities to help them develop speaking and listening skills. Progress in mathematics is stronger than that seen in other subjects.

Teaching assistants are more effective. They provide support for groups who are new to English, using picture-referenced resources to aid understanding. Where practice is strongest, teaching assistants make a significant contribution to the learning of pupils. However, this is not always the case and, in some classes, repetitive name-writing tasks were not helping pupils to move forward because pupils copied incorrect models and handwriting skills were not reinforced.

The teaching of phonics follows a structured plan; pupils are grouped by ability so that their differing needs can be met. Pupils are encouraged to talk to each other throughout the sessions in order to develop speaking skills. Teachers take opportunities to explain new vocabulary to consolidate language development. The modelling of sounds is not consistent across the classes. Further work to improve teacher subject knowledge and to support less experienced teachers is required.

Pupils in Year 6 demonstrated positive attitudes to reading. They used dictionaries to check the meaning of unknown words. Grouping based on prior attainment enabled the teacher to provide appropriate challenge for the most able pupils. As a result, pupils worked hard and concentrated on comprehension tasks, demonstrating high levels of independence and self-motivation.

The quality of the learning environment varies across the school. More work is needed to provide a language-rich environment to develop the spoken and written language, particularly in the early years.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The behaviour of pupils continues to improve. Leaders are consistent in their approach and demonstrate a sound understanding of pupils' needs across the school. As a result, behaviour in classrooms is calm, with pupils engaging in given tasks. Pupils respond well to the variety of frequent rewards. Leaders closely monitor behaviour around the school, in corridors, outside and in the dining room. As a result, pupils feel safe. Pupils recognise that playtimes are better, and although there are the occasional fights, this does not happen often and staff quickly sort them out.

Leaders are investing heavily in maintaining and further improving current standards of behaviour. Behaviour tracking and monitoring validate improvements through a significant reduction of recorded incidents over time. The use of both permanent and fixed-term exclusions has reduced. More pupils now act as positive role models for others, which is particularly important because of the number of new pupils constantly entering the school. Higher behaviour expectations, along with targeted work with families, are helping parents and carers to understand the importance of ensuring that their children behave well in school.

Attendance remains well below that seen in most schools nationally. Improvements are well documented, but the school still has much work to do with parents to improve attitudes and values. Staff visit homes daily to escort pupils to school, regularly meet parents and work closely with the local authority to issue fixed-penalty notices. Leaders work relentlessly to identify reasons for non-attendance. They are beginning to earn the trust of parents. Recent work to encourage families to inform the school when pupils will be visiting relatives abroad has resulted in 57 requests for term-time holidays over the Christmas period. Although this is unacceptable, school leaders can account for the non-attendance of pupils and know when they are due back in the country.

Outcomes for pupils

Attainment across the school remains well below that seen by pupils nationally. The majority of pupils enter the school with skills and knowledge well below those seen typically. Pupils still have a long way to catch up. Most groups of pupils make expected progress across the different subjects. However, because their starting points are so low, they need to make accelerated progress.

Outcomes in 2016 show low attainment for all groups. High numbers of pupils in Year 6 had not been in school long enough for them to be able to reach the expected standards. In Reception, many children joined school part way through the year because families choose to send their children to school the term after they

reach five years old. This has a significant impact on outcomes in the early years, the phonics screening check and the end of Year 2 assessments.

Leaders are carefully tracking the progress of all groups within the school. Leaders regularly meet with teachers to review the progress made by pupils in class. The school uses their pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils through extra interventions for English and mathematics. Improvements over time are difficult to measure because of the constant flux in the roll of the school. Some improvements to the way in which the 'constant' group of pupils are tracked in comparison to the 'transient' group should give the academy council and leaders a more up-to-date and accurate picture of rates of progress.

External support

School leaders make good use of the external support provided through links with local schools and other academies. The regional director provides a high degree of support and challenge. Through regular visits, he has a clear understanding of where the school is improving and recognises the urgency of actions required. Joint observations with the principal ensure accuracy of judgements and provide opportunities for professional dialogue. Regular reviews provide helpful external evidence to support or challenge leaders' views. The school has secured a stronger senior leadership team and are now focused on developing the next layer of middle leaders.

The governors have completed their review of governance, which has helped them to clarify their roles within the school. They have a range of skills and work closely with leaders, providing an increasing level of challenge. The local authority works closely within this group, providing strong links, training and support.