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Mr Tom Beveridge
Head of School
The Dean Academy
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Dear Mr Beveridge

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Dean Academy

Following my visit with Judith Mee, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 31 January and 1 February 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. Please also pass my thanks on to the pupils, staff and governors we met during the inspection.

The inspection was the third 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.

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 CEO 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 third monitoring inspection on 31 January 1 February 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, faculty leaders, a group of teachers and teaching assistants, and groups of pupils. The monitoring Her Majesty's Inspector met the director of the Athelstan Trust and the chair and one other member 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 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 school was previously sponsored by Prospects Academies Trust (from 2012), as Dean Academy, until the trust 'folded' in May 2014. It had been placed in special measures, as Whitecross School, in 2011.

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 on 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.

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 accurately identified where additional governors were needed.

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 has also arranged other external support for senior and middle leaders and training for staff.

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

The school leaders have continued to strengthen the arrangements for internal exclusion and the separate 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 and improved by the second visit in November 2016.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The marked improvements in many aspects of the school noted in the letter following the second monitoring visit in November 2016 have been sustained. Additionally, leaders and governors have responded well to the improvement points included in that letter. Improvements in teaching have been consolidated, although senior leaders and governors are fully aware that more needs to be done. Extensive support for the special educational needs coordinator has improved practice and raised the achievement of those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The huge improvement in pupils' behaviour has been maintained. Staff and pupils' morale continues to rise, not least because of the obvious confidence they have in the headteacher and other senior leaders.

Senior leaders, supported by the trust, drew up a detailed improvement plan with challenging targets at the start of this academic year. Progress against this plan is checked frequently and robustly by leaders and governors. Even though they sensibly 'err on the side of caution', the significant progress that has been made is clear. Those aspects that were strong have been at least sustained and often improved further. The areas that still need significant improvement are fewer. The school is well on track towards having special measures removed. Despite this, senior leaders are fully aware that small pockets of stubborn resistance need to be tackled as a matter of urgency.

The programme of rigorous reviews of subject faculties provides an accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. They are used well to identify and target support for subject teachers and leaders. The reviews have a clear focus on evaluating pupils' progress prior to evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and assessment that is not evident in many routine observations made by senior leaders.

Senior leaders are developing a range of assessment and tracking procedures that will enable them to have an accurate and reliable understanding of the current progress of all pupils and groups of pupils in all subjects. These are close to completion. They have taken time and care to do this well to avoid the unreliability that led to wildly inaccurate predictions in previous years. They also know that getting this done quickly is essential.

Governance is strong. The local governing body is exceptionally well led and very well placed to support and challenge the school's senior and middle leaders. Governors have an impressive understanding of what is working well, what needs to

improve and their roles in ensuring things improve rapidly.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet all requirements. Pupils are safe and well looked after. Staff are trained well and their understanding checked. Governors monitor the effectiveness of all safeguarding arrangements robustly.

Senior leaders, governors and leaders from the trust have continued to work hard to build the confidence of parents and the local community, with success. Much of this is now being done by the headteacher and other school leaders as they have established their credibility. Good relationships are also being established with other secondary schools in the Forest of Dean to develop more collaborative work.

There are two areas where more needs to be done prior to the next monitoring inspection:

- ensuring an even sharper focus on the quality of pupils' work and learning when senior and subject leaders evaluate teaching, learning and assessment
- ensuring that the arrangements for the accurate monitoring of pupils', and groups of pupils', progress are in place.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The improvements in teaching, learning and assessment seen in November have been sustained and more recent developments have started to raise the quality further.

Teaching is largely effective in most faculties and subjects, including in English, history, languages, physical education, values and society, and in creative and practical subjects. Overall, the quantity of effective teaching is close to reaching a 'critical mass' where the amount of good practice drives improvements across the school. However, teaching is still not consistently good enough in mathematics and science and there is still weaker teaching in some other subjects, for example, in geography.

Senior and faculty leaders know precisely where teaching needs to improve. The 'Dean lesson' continues to provide an excellent framework for driving up the quality. Weaker teachers are supported well and mostly improve. Pupils are clear about where teaching is better and where they feel they do not learn enough. This corresponds exactly with senior leaders', and inspectors', analysis.

The key priority is mathematics and, while too much teaching is still not good enough, there are encouraging signs of recent developments beginning to make a difference. The mathematics curriculum leader has introduced much greater clarity about progression through key mathematical concepts across all year groups. This is helping teachers to plan more effectively and pupils to see the 'big picture' of how

their current learning is building on previous work and where it is heading. The leader has also developed a much more robust system of diagnostic assessment that is beginning to improve the quality of feedback and level of challenge for pupils. The mathematics leader also recognises that the existing small amount of good practice in helping pupils to have the confidence to explain their mathematical reasoning needs to be much more widespread. More support will be provided for the mathematics leader from the May half term. The progress made and the impact of these actions will be checked at the next monitoring visit.

There is some highly effective teaching in science. However, the most able pupils in, for example, Year 10, are not challenged to show their full potential. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is designed well to develop pupils' understanding of key scientific concepts. However, this is not applied effectively by some teachers – leading to fragmented pieces of work that pupils do not fully understand and it does not develop their deeper understanding. As noted before, pupils are given too few opportunities to show their understanding of science through their writing.

A senior leader, with external support, has worked well with the special educational needs coordinator to produce individual profiles for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These identify very clearly potential barriers to learning and strategies that have been shown to be effective in supporting these pupils. Some teachers are using these well, leading to pupils being much more involved and better learning. Teaching assistants are extremely positive about this development. They feel much more involved and that they are used more effectively. Other teachers are not using the profiles well and pupils in these classes make less progress.

A diagnostic assessment system is used very effectively to establish pupils' prior knowledge and understanding and check their progress in English, mathematics and science in Years 7, 8 and 9. The outcomes are used extremely well to identify and support specific groups of pupils, particularly those who need to catch up and those who are disadvantaged.

School leaders have worked hard on improving pupils' reading. Younger pupils are very enthusiastic about the accelerated reading scheme. Some subject teachers are supporting this well by helping pupils with weaker reading to become more involved in the work the class are doing. Less progress has been made in supporting pupils with weak writing skills so that they can show what they understand and can do in all subjects.

By the time of the next visit, senior leaders need to build on the widespread existing good practice to ensure that all teachers:

- establish and build on what pupils already know, understand and can do
- check progress more carefully to ensure that interventions and support are targeted well and make a difference

- provide work that helps pupils of all abilities make the progress they are capable of
- ensure that pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve their work
- make effective use of the profiles for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- recognise and deal with pupils whose reading skills make it difficult for them to do the set work
- help pupils who need to develop their writing skills to show what they understand and can do.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

All of the positive features and improvements seen at the time of the November 2016 visit and noted in the letter are being maintained. Leaders' and teachers' focus on the all-round development of pupils continues to be a priority and a success.

The very large majority of pupils behave very well in lessons and around the site. Occasionally, when teaching does not grab their attention or work is too easy, their behaviour slips a little and this affects their and others' learning. Pupils in all year groups commented on the extremely positive impact of the on-site alternative provision centre. They commented that it helped the pupils sent there, as well as improving behaviour around the school. The small number of pupils who use the separate 'student services' centre also continue to praise the staff who work there.

When pupils are interested, they show good attitudes to their work. They respond well to verbal and written feedback from the teacher, work well with each other and try hard to do their best. However, while mostly behaving well, pupils do not show great enthusiasm for learning when teachers' expectations are too low. When poorly presented, missing and incomplete work is not dealt with, pupils do not make much effort to improve its quality. Pupils themselves are very honest about all of this. The 'pupil pursuits' undertaken by heads of year across a range of classes helps to identify why pupils behave better in some classes than others. This is used well to target support for pupils and teachers.

Bullying is uncommon. All incidents are recorded. However, these records do not indicate the type of bullying, therefore limiting leaders' analysis of causes and the effectiveness of solutions.

Pupils' attendance overall is at least in line with average. It is not yet good enough for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many pupils who joined the school at the start of Year 7 previously did not attend school regularly. For the very large majority, this improves during their time in the school. In addition, a large number of pupils join the school at times other than at the start of Year 7. Many of these pupils are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and often both. Most join with a history of poor attendance and underachievement. The school is successful in

improving these pupils' attendance as well as their attitudes, although often not to the national average. Currently, while senior leaders know the details for each of these pupils, they do not fully analyse the impact on the overall data for the school to provide a more precise picture.

A higher proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities than others are excluded from the school for fixed periods. Senior leaders are fully aware of this, but have not yet analysed the impact of the improved provision for these pupils on reducing this. They have not checked to see if fewer incidents occur in classes where teachers make effective use of the new pupil profiles.

By the time of the next visit, senior leaders need to:

- ensure that those teachers who need to improve their practice fully understand the links between weaknesses in teaching and pupils' poor attitudes and take responsibility for dealing with this
- analyse attendance and behaviour information for individual and specific groups of pupils to give a more precise understanding of underlying causes, possible solutions and the effectiveness of actions taken to improve these where necessary.

Outcomes for pupils

The progress and achievement of current pupils continues to rise overall. There is more work in pupils' books and portfolios that shows strong progress across the majority of subjects. However, it still includes the full range from outstanding, as seen for example in engineering, to a minority that is inadequate for some pupils in mathematics and for some pupils with low prior achievement in science.

Current Year 11 pupils are on track to do better than those in 2016, but the gains will not be marked. These pupils joined the school in 2011 and have experienced the range of problems it has been through since that time. There are more encouraging signs of better progress for current Year 10 pupils, although these pupils will also require extensive support to achieve well.

The work that senior leaders have undertaken to embed improvements for pupils in Years 7 to 9 are making a difference and achievement is rising, but is still uneven. Pupils' progress is clearly stronger, as expected, in those subjects and classes where teaching and assessment is stronger. Senior leaders are fully aware that there are still small pockets of ineffective learning.

The intensive support given to disadvantaged pupils is raising their achievement. However, more still needs to be done when they are in their usual subject classes to ensure that their full potential is recognised and they are challenged to do as well as can.

The Year 7 support group is effective in helping those pupils who need to catch up. Great care is taken to ensure that pupils who spend time in the on-site alternative provision make progress in their learning as well as them having help to move back into the main school.

The overall achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving. There is a marked difference from the previous visit in November, although there is still some variation between different classes.

External support

The school continues to receive extensive, high-quality support directly from, and arranged by, the Athelstan Trust. This support is targeted extremely effectively on the key areas for improvement and has strengthened subject and other middle leadership. This has been effective in sustaining improvements in the quality of teaching.

The trust's chief executive and the executive headteacher have supported the head of the school and other senior leaders exceptionally well so that they, as a team and individually, have the confidence and skills to rapidly improve the school further.

The support given to the special educational needs coordinator has helped raise the achievement of those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The support planned, and just beginning, has brought more confidence to the mathematics leader and team.

The chair of the local governing body, a national leader of governance, is seconded by the trust. She has built and trained the governing body so that it is able to provide the effective balance of support and challenge needed to move the school forward.