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Mr Tom Beveridge
Headteacher
The Dean Academy
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Dear Mr Beveridge

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Dean Academy

Following my visit with Richard Butler and Ben Sillince, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 14–15 June 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 fourth 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 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

Paul Williams
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 fourth monitoring inspection on 14 to 15 June 2017

Evidence

During the inspection, inspectors observed pupils' learning in a range of subjects and across all year groups. Inspectors met the headteacher, executive headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and staff. The lead inspector met the chief executive officer of the Athelstan Trust. Inspectors spoke with pupils from Years 7 to 10 formally and with the student leadership group. Inspectors met with the chair of the local governing body and one other governor and scrutinised a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding.

Context

The Dean Academy is sponsored by the Athelstan Trust.

The Athelstan Trust is a multi-academy trust that currently comprises three schools: Bradon Forest School, The Dean Academy and Malmesbury School, the lead school in the trust.

There have been no changes to the senior leadership team since the previous monitoring inspection, which took place in February 2017. The headteacher, who took up his post in September 2016, continues to work closely with the executive headteacher and the chief executive officer of the trust.

The chair of the local governing body, a national leader of governance, is seconded to the role until September 2017. A new volunteer will take up the role from that point; however, the current chair will continue to serve as a governor and provide support and guidance. The local governing body has one sub-committee, which scrutinises the curriculum and educational standards at the school.

The trust provides expertise and support to oversee personnel and finance issues.

A number of staff are either employed directly by the trust to work across all of its schools or are seconded to this school from Malmesbury School. This support continues. Two more teachers will join the school from Malmesbury School in September 2017. The three schools in the trust have planned further collaborative work for the future.

Two participants in the 'TeachFirst' programme will join the school in September 2017 to add to the two who are already working in the school. This is an initial teacher training programme which develops teachers who show leadership potential.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The improvements in leadership and management identified in the third monitoring inspection in February 2017 have continued. Good communication among governors, senior leaders and the trust is leading to an accurate analysis of the priorities for further work at the school. The trust continues to play a pivotal role in supporting the school to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning. The trust has enabled the recruitment of key members of staff for next academic year, and, significantly, a new chair of the local governing body.

Governance is continuing to improve. The increase in the size, experience and skill of the governing body has increased its capacity to challenge the school effectively. Plans in place for succession to a new chair in September 2017 are suitable, along with plans to make links between governors and faculty areas. These changes will ensure that the governance arrangements are sustainable for the future. Governors are taking a strategic view of the school's development. Their effective planning demonstrates a good awareness of the challenges the school still faces.

The headteacher and other senior leaders are visibly present around the school. This instils confidence in staff that the improvements in behaviour that have already been secured are set to continue. There is, therefore, an increasing willingness among staff to embrace new procedures and ways of working when they are introduced.

The leadership of teaching and learning continues to be instrumental in raising teachers' expectations and helping them to improve their practice. Improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are being secured through a successful model of coaching and support.

Most middle leaders have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas. Their self-evaluation is being helped by regular meetings with senior leaders which increasingly focus on the progress of key groups of pupils. The progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs is being evaluated more sharply as a result. However, there is variability in the speed at which middle leaders are able to bring about the necessary changes identified by these regular meetings.

Senior leaders' work to introduce better assessment and tracking arrangements is resulting in a growing confidence that the information held by the school about pupils' progress is robust. Senior and middle leaders are using the results of new tests, taken by pupils at fixed points during each year, to set benchmarks for pupils' attainment. There is some evidence to suggest that these arrangements for monitoring pupils' progress are helping to raise pupils' and teachers' expectations. However, it is too early to fully evaluate them yet.

Senior leaders have ensured that individual profiles are produced for pupils who

have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These profiles are now in use by teachers and other staff and, among other improvements in practice, have resulted in signs of better achievement for this group. The leadership of this area of the school's work remains an important priority for improvement.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are thorough and detailed. The record of these checks is up to date and meets government requirements. Staff who join the school receive suitable induction training and so have a good understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures. The roles and responsibilities of all staff in playing their part in keeping pupils safe are clear and so a culture of vigilance exists across the school.

The school remains on track towards having special measures removed because the improvements noted in the first three monitoring visits have been consolidated. There are still areas which need significant improvement. Senior leaders, governors and the trust have credible plans in place to deal with these.

Before the next monitoring inspection, leaders and managers need to ensure that the arrangements for the accurate monitoring of pupils', and groups of pupils', progress are evaluated.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The improvements in teaching, learning and assessment, noted in the previous monitoring inspection, continue. Teachers are establishing the teaching methods that have been introduced through coaching initiatives over the last year and so practice is becoming more consistent.

Teaching in English continues to improve because the curriculum changes that have been introduced, in key stage 3 in particular, are helping teachers to structure pupils' learning more effectively. Teachers are now developing pupils' skills more adeptly by making links between topics within each year and between each year. Teachers now have a better understanding of the knowledge and understanding pupils gain in Year 6, and so they are better able to build pupils' skills from their individual starting points.

Science teaching has improved since the previous monitoring inspection. Teachers are addressing the needs of pupils who join the school with lower attainment more effectively. There is, however, more scope for increasing the level of demand for the most able pupils. Where pupils are taught by established teachers, they are enjoying the subject and say they feel supported well. For example, pupils were very appreciative of the revision activities provided by science teachers for Year 11 pupils during the exam period. Teacher absence, however, continues to be a significant challenge for the faculty.

The subject leader in mathematics continues to develop the curriculum so that teachers plan better progression in the work they give to pupils. As a result, teachers are able to develop pupils' mathematical skills more effectively as they move through each year. Mathematics teachers have benefited from continued coaching support provided by the trust. In a minority of cases, expectations of pupils' behaviour are still too low and consequently pupils' progress suffers. Teachers are able to identify pupils' starting points accurately. However, planning is not yet leading to work being provided for pupils which is sufficiently demanding for the different abilities in each class. The most able pupils, in particular, are not being given more demanding work and so some of these pupils are not developing their skills at the rate they are capable of.

Teachers' assessments of pupils continue to improve and become more accurate. A digital assessment package is helping to raise expectations of what pupils are capable of by providing teachers with an external reference point to compare their judgements. This is at an early stage, so a full cycle of test and review has not been completed yet. Pupils who need to catch up and those who are disadvantaged are still benefiting from extra help provided by the school outside their normal lessons. The effectiveness of initiatives designed to help these pupils within their normal lessons is less clear.

The quality of feedback provided to pupils about their work, across a range of subjects, has improved in general. Most teachers comment on pupils' work and offer advice according to the school's expectations described in the 'Dean lesson'. Some pupils, however, still do not have a clear idea about how to improve their work because they do not fully understand the language used to give them feedback. Pupils report that the different systems used for feedback about their work in each subject area can lead to some confusion about the expectations teachers have of them.

Teachers have a better understanding of the individual needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities than at the previous monitoring inspection. This is because they have access to detailed pupil profiles which describe the particular support each pupil requires. Teaching assistants are now more adept at giving these pupils responsibility for developing their own skills. For example, teaching assistants know when to stand back and allow pupils to grapple with problems before being helped. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly in Years 10 and 11, are being given support which is helping them to make better progress.

The school has introduced a programme to accelerate pupils' reading ability. Teachers combine this with regular reading in tutor groups, and other initiatives, to successfully improve pupils' reading skills. Most teachers make reference to the school's eight literacy focus areas in their written feedback to pupils. However, there are still examples of inaccurate spelling in pupils' books which are not being challenged.

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

- 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.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The marked improvement in the behaviour of pupils since October 2015, noted in previous monitoring inspections, has been the cornerstone of development at the school. Teachers are now able to focus on raising pupils' achievement because basic expectations of pupils' behaviour have been established successfully.

Pupils' behaviour around the school site is generally calm. Pupils move between lessons in an orderly way and most pupils wear their uniform smartly. Teachers need to remind some pupils about expectations of behaviour and uniform when moving around the school. Pupils' response is usually positive and good humoured when this happens. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is similarly calm and good humoured in the large majority of cases. Most teachers use the behaviour management system effectively, and it has now become established. However, pupils commented to inspectors that application of the system varies between teachers. The school's records, which indicate different types of bullying, show that bullying is not common. Pupils who spoke to inspectors confirmed this.

There are still a few pupils whose behaviour is sometimes challenging, but effective steps are being taken to help these individuals respond to teachers appropriately. The student services centre continues to play a positive role in helping a small number of pupils to improve their behaviour and then re-integrate back into the main school. As a consequence of this work, the rate of fixed-term exclusion of pupils continues to fall. The exclusion rate for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, in particular, has decreased dramatically since the previous monitoring visit.

Pupils' attitudes are positive when they are given interesting and motivating work by teachers. When this is the case, pupils try hard and the good presentation of their written work demonstrates the care they are taking over it. When teachers' expectations are not as high, pupils' motivation wanes and, consequently, the quality of their work is not as high. Senior leaders have introduced regular pupil attitude surveys this year and a student leadership team has just been set up. Both of these initiatives will, as they become more established, enhance senior leaders' understanding of the underlying causes of patterns in pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Overall attendance is improving and is in line with the national average. Although

rates of attendance still vary for different groups of pupils, the school's work to encourage good attendance has had some success with disadvantaged pupils. Fewer disadvantaged pupils are now persistently absent from school.

Before the next monitoring inspection, senior leaders need to consolidate the gains they have made in pupils' attendance by extending them to different pupil groups.

Outcomes for pupils

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve continue to rise because the greater rigour of monitoring by senior leaders is being felt at middle leadership level. Regular evaluation of the progress of pupils, and groups of pupils, is now taking place. As a result of raised expectations, pupils' progress across a range of subjects continues to show some improvement. Assessment information held by the school indicates that current Year 11 pupils are still on track to at least match and in many cases exceed the outcomes achieved last year. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils, and Year 10 pupils in particular, are making better progress than in previous years.

Improvements within the English faculty, resulting from more effective middle leadership, have seen pupils' progress improve. However, these improvements have not been as marked in mathematics. Some pupils' progress in mathematics is still below that which could reasonably be expected. Pupils' progress in science continues to rise. Where pupils with low prior attainment are given work in science that is at a suitable level of difficulty, they are responding well.

Disadvantaged pupils continue to benefit from intensive support to make up for gaps in their knowledge, understanding and skills identified by the school's assessment processes. While this support makes a difference out of lessons, efforts by senior leaders to ensure that these pupils are consistently challenged in their everyday lessons have been slow to be implemented. For example, strategies to ensure that the written feedback pupils receive about their work is of the highest quality have only recently been introduced. Consequently, they have had limited impact at this point in time.

The most able pupils are beginning to make better progress than in the past because teaching is challenging them more effectively. The trust has introduced an initiative across all three schools to ensure that the most able pupils are stretched in their learning. In particular, the most able disadvantaged pupils are benefiting from this initiative and so these pupils' progress is improving. However, there is still much to do to stretch and challenge the most able pupils further.

Pupils in Years 10 and 11 who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are now making better progress than last year. However, this is not the case across all year groups. The progress of these pupils in Years 8 and 9 has not yet improved.

Pupils, particularly those in key stage 3, are becoming more confident in both reading and writing as a result of the action being taken by leaders. Pupils regularly demonstrate the confidence to read aloud to their peers in class. Pupils' written work in several subject areas illustrates growing confidence in writing at length and for different purposes.

External support

The school receives support through the Athelstan Trust. The close relationship between the three schools in the trust is used to provide very effective support at senior and middle leadership level. The trust has ensured that improvements in the quality of teaching are being consolidated. By facilitating the recruitment of staff flexibly across the three schools, the trust is set to secure further improvement.

The headteacher is able to draw readily on the expertise of the chief executive officer and the executive headteacher, both of whom work at the school for part of each week.

The trust has overseen the appointment of a new chair of the local governing body for September 2017. Support from the trust is giving the governing body confidence that there will be a smooth transition as the current chair of the local governing body, a national leader of governance, steps down from her role.

The support of the trust is bringing about sustainable change. At each stage the trust has made decisions based on a determination to maintain the inclusive ethos of the school. Senior leaders, appointed by the trust, have gained the confidence of staff and parents as a consequence. There is now optimism for the future.