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Mrs Tina Graham
Principal
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Milton Lane
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Dear Mrs Graham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Dartmouth Academy

Following my visit with Mark Lees, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 27 and 28 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 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 academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve pupils' outcomes by taking rigorous and rapid action to drive up achievement:
 - for disadvantaged pupils across the academy
 - for boys, so that their progress and attainment matches that of girls by the end of Key Stage 4
 - in mathematics, particularly in pupils' use and understanding of number in the primary phase
 - in the sixth form, so that pupils complete their courses successfully
 - in the primary phase, so that pupils have the skills they need to thrive in the secondary phase
 - across all subjects in the secondary phase, so that inconsistencies are eliminated and pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- Improve teaching so that it is at least good and more is outstanding by:
 - making sure that teachers have the highest expectations, including of how pupils present and complete their work
 - identifying the needs of disadvantaged pupils and ensuring that they receive effective support
 - ensuring that teachers check pupils' understanding, put right misconceptions and move learning on more quickly
 - placing a relentless focus on developing pupils' literacy skills
 - ensuring the accuracy and reliability of assessment information, including in the sixth form, and making sure that teachers use this to challenge all groups of pupils in every lesson.
- Improve pupils' behaviour so that, in every lesson, pupils develop good attitudes to learning and make better progress.
- Urgently improve the procedures for recording the use of restraint. Make sure that leaders use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of support for pupils and reduce the use of restraint over time.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management, and governance, by:
 - implementing a sharply focused action plan to address the academy's weaknesses, setting clear timelines and checking closely the impact of actions taken

- clarifying the long-term future of the sixth form provision
- developing an academy-wide strategy for improving pupils' literacy skills
- ensuring a rigorous approach to checking the quality of teaching and responding rapidly to weaknesses identified
- tracking carefully patterns in the achievement, attendance and behaviour of different groups of pupils across the academy, and taking swift and effective action in response
- ensuring that additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils is consistently effective in helping them to make better progress, particularly in the secondary phase
- making sure that governors play a full and effective part in challenging academy leaders to bring about rapid improvement.

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 funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 27 June 2017 and 28 June 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior leaders, the extended leadership team, the chair of the interim academy council and the executive principal (director of education) for Education South West, the school's multi-academy trust. The lead inspector spoke to the trust's chief executive officer by telephone. Inspectors also held discussions with groups of pupils from across the school's age range and examined their work. The sixth form is temporarily closed and, therefore, areas for improvement related to it were not considered during this visit.

Context

A number of staff changes have taken place since the second monitoring visit, including the appointment of a new assistant principal, who is also the designated safeguarding lead. The head of English has also taken on the role of special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) since February 2017. The senior leadership team has been reorganised and an extended leadership team has been created. The school became a member of the Education South West multi-academy trust in January 2017, when its existing trust merged with another local multi-academy trust. In addition to Dartmouth Academy, the new trust is made up of five primary and three secondary schools.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal continues to provide strong leadership to the academy. In this, she is ably supported by other senior leaders and the recently formed extended leadership team. Her vision for a high-achieving and aspirational educational community is undiminished. It is communicated well at all levels, to governors, staff and pupils, and shared by them. Her mantra that pupils should seek to be their 'best selves' is lived out on a day-to-day basis in the academy and manifests itself most clearly in the pupils' positive attitudes to learning and their excellent relationships with staff. As a result, pupils' progress continues to improve across the school.

Recent additions to the senior leadership team have added further capacity to the leadership and management of the school, especially in the areas of safeguarding and provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This added capacity has also allowed senior leadership roles to be restructured effectively. As a result, leaders focus even more closely on the key priorities identified in the school's improvement plan.

The creation of an extended leadership team is playing an important part in building leadership capacity. Indeed, middle leaders are an emerging strength of the school.

The large majority of them are new in post and most are relatively new to the school. They bring enthusiasm and drive to their new roles. They relish the autonomy that senior leaders give them but recognise that with that autonomy comes heightened accountability. They share the principal's relentless focus on improving academic achievement. Middle leaders' skills are being developed well by the training they receive and through the opportunities for professional development provided by their membership of the newly constructed extended leadership team.

The interim academy council (IAC) is continuing to exercise strong strategic oversight and contributes very effectively to the school's journey of improvement. Members of the IAC provide good levels of support and challenge to school leaders, drawing on their wealth of experience. Plans for the future development of the IAC are clear and have been thought through well. For example, membership of the IAC is expanding as governors with valuable key skills and good knowledge of the local community are brought on board. Succession-planning for the transition from the IAC to a permanent local governing body is in place.

Planning for improvement is a strength of school leaders, governors and trust officers. The academy improvement plan is wide in scope (measured in terms of the aspects of school life it covers) but tightly focused on the central goal of improved achievement by pupils. This plan is regularly reviewed at all levels of leadership and is being used very well to identify areas that the school needs to work on. For example, while a new policy relating to the feedback that teachers give to pupils has been introduced successfully, the consistency of its application requires further embedding.

School leaders are using the opportunities of the enlarged multi-academy trust to find creative solutions to budgetary pressures. The use of secondment has allowed staff to be deployed imaginatively across the trust, to the benefit of pupils and teachers' own professional development. In addition, the increasing use of trust-wide appointments allows the school to build capacity in ways that might not otherwise be possible for a school of its relatively small size. For example, from September 2017, the school will share a fulltime SENCo with a neighbouring school in the trust.

Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving. The SENCo has an excellent understanding of the role, based upon previous experience in this role in other schools. Although relatively new in post, she has already begun a root-and-branch review of the school's work. The special educational needs register has been reviewed and pupils' needs are more accurately identified now. This means that additional funding can be used in a more targeted and effective way. The next steps for further improvement have also been clearly identified, such as focusing more precisely on monitoring and evaluating the impact of additional support on the various kinds of special educational need.

Safeguarding is effective. The recently appointed assistant principal has taken on the role of designated safeguarding lead. Although very new in post, he has already begun to review the school's procedures with a view to making them even sharper. For example, a new way of recording any use of restraint has been introduced, although there has been no occasion to use this procedure as yet.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve across the school. Typically, a greater level of challenge is evident and teachers have higher expectations of the quality of work pupils produce and the way they present it. These improvements are clearest in the core subjects of English and mathematics, where leaders have placed a great deal of emphasis on ensuring that pupils experience consistently strong teaching across all year groups. For example, Year 9 English teaching enables pupils to engage in depth with challenging texts, such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, whatever their individual starting points. In the primary phase, the teaching of literacy and numeracy is developing a secure understanding of the key skills that form the foundation of later success. The school's challenge now is to ensure that this consistency and degree of challenge are clear in all subjects and key stages, especially in the secondary phase, where the range of subjects pupils study is inevitably wider. This is already beginning to happen. French teaching, for example, develops high levels of precision in terms of vocabulary, grammar and translation.

Improved assessment systems mean that the performance of key groups of pupils is being tracked more closely and precisely. It is now easier for leaders to identify any groups of pupils or individuals who need additional support. As a result of better identification of needs, the progress of disadvantaged pupils or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving. In addition, regular testing of pupils' reading ages allows leaders to monitor the impact of teaching on this aspect of literacy. A school-wide focus on improving literacy in all subjects is developing pupils' ability to apply the skills they learn in their English lessons across the curriculum.

At the time of the inspection in 2015, which judged the school as a whole to be in need of special measures, the provision for children in the early years foundation stage was judged to be good. Since then, the school has maintained the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the early years and children continue to get off to a good start to their education in Nursery and Reception. This is because teaching is well planned to promote deep and secure learning. Assessment in the early years is accurate and used well to identify children's strengths and the areas in which they may require further support. Target setting is effective and children know what their targets are and how to improve their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the inspection in 2015, there has been a dramatic improvement in pupils' willingness and readiness to learn. Punctuality to lessons, for instance, is exemplary. This indicates not only the highly effective work by leaders and teachers to create established routines but also the keenness of pupils to learn when they are at school. Pupils' books show increasing pride in their work and a willingness to respond to the school's high expectations of quality and presentation.

Conduct in lessons and at other times is excellent. Pupils are courteous to each other and to adults. Early in this academic year, the principal re-emphasised the school's expectations for behaviour. This led to a temporary rise in recorded behavioural incidents and exclusions, but pupils have reacted well to these heightened expectations and behaviour has improved noticeably.

Attendance remains an area of some concern. Despite school leaders' many actions to tackle it, absence remains stubbornly high. The newly appointed assistant principal is developing the school's response to this issue and is aware that the analysis of patterns in absence rates needs further refinement. It is too early, however, to say whether these new initiatives will have a sustained impact on improving attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

The progress children make in the early years remains good. The proportion who reach a good level of development, often from low starting points, is in line with the national average. This is a consequence of effective teaching, learning and assessment in Nursery and Reception. This good start is generally consolidated well in key stage 1. However, the rate at which those pupils who met the expected standard in early years go on to meet the expected standard at the end of Year 2 is a little below the national average. Nonetheless, the proportion of pupils who pass the phonics screening check is in line with the national average, as it has been in previous years. The progress that pupils make across key stage 2 is in line with other pupils nationally, as it is also for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils' work shows that they are being well taught in reading, writing and mathematics, acquiring the key skills that prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

Since the last monitoring visit in October 2016, the release of the validated assessment and attainment information confirmed the judgement made then that the results at key stage 4 were an improvement on previous years and the best in the school's history. Overall progress was in line with the national average, including for disadvantaged pupils. The work of pupils in the current Year 11 who have just taken their GCSEs shows that pupils have been well prepared for the demands of public examinations. Evidence of progress is strong here in core subjects, such as English and mathematics, and in some other subjects. History teaching, for example, is developing the key skills of successful historians well, such as the ability

to write developed, balanced arguments.

The work in the English books of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities shows that the additional support they receive is having a positive impact on their literacy skills. This is enabling them to make faster progress, whatever their starting points.

External support

The support provided by the multi-academy trust, Education South West, is having a significant impact on school improvement, especially in the areas of leadership and management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The chief executive officer and executive principal (director of education) have provided good support to the principal in her drive for school improvement. The trust has arranged effective training for leaders and teachers and links between Dartmouth Academy and other schools in the trust are strong. Imaginative use of secondment and joint appointments across the trust is securing and building capacity in leadership and teaching. The trust has supported a range of activities, such as cross-school work moderation, which has led to an improvement in the quality of assessment.