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28 November 2017

Mrs Denise Hurr
The King Alfred School
Burnham Road
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Dear Mrs Hurr

Special measures monitoring inspection of The King Alfred School

Following my visit with David New, Ofsted Inspector, and David Herbert, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 14–15 November 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2017.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's development plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2017.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - strengthening the governing body so that it is well informed and able to challenge the school's leaders about the effectiveness of their actions
 - ensuring that systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school support leaders and governors to accurately check the impact of planned actions
 - ensuring compliance with the statutory requirements for the teaching of religious education
 - making sure that attendance initiatives are embedded and absence rates decrease
 - improving the curriculum provision to ensure that students can follow 16 to 19 programmes of study which meet their needs.
- Urgently take action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to improve outcomes for pupils across the curriculum by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils of all abilities can achieve
 - providing pupils with learning tasks which are closely matched to their needs, particularly the most able pupils
 - ensuring that teachers have access to information about pupils' prior learning and needs, and use this information to plan activities that enable pupils to succeed
 - making sure that pupils complete tasks to a high standard
 - promoting good behaviour which engages all pupils in their learning
 - ensuring that pupils, including those in alternative provision, better understand the risks they may face in society, particularly the potential danger of extremist views and sexual exploitation.
- Ensure that pupils, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged:
 - improve their attendance
 - have any barriers to their learning identified and tackled to increase the rate at which they make academic progress.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 14 November 2017 to 15 November 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, representatives from the Priory Learning Trust and members of the governing body. Telephone conversations took place with a representative from the local authority and the Somerset education partner.

Inspectors conducted joint visits to lessons with senior leaders to observe pupils' learning and behaviour.

Context

The school had been receiving support from the Clevedon Learning Trust until the end of summer 2017. Since September 2017, the Priory Learning Trust (PLT) has been identified as the sponsor for the school when it academises. An assistant headteacher from the PLT has recently commenced working at the school to add capacity to the leadership team. A head of school improvement works two days a week at the school funded by the PLT and Somerset local authority. A new special educational needs (SEN) coordinator took up post in September 2017.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders, middle leaders and governors have done too little to improve the quality of teaching across the school. Seven months after the school was placed into special measures, the quality of teaching remains too inconsistent and too much is of a poor quality. As a result, pupils make insufficient progress in their learning.

Central to the lack of improvement in the quality of teaching is insufficient rigour in the monitoring and evaluation by some senior leaders and subject leaders. There is widespread acknowledgement that too many teachers are not following the school's agreed policies and expectations in the classroom. Despite this, the challenge by some leaders to underperforming teachers is too slow or non-existent. Some subject leaders do not understand their responsibility to monitor and evaluate the performance of teachers within their subjects and to challenge poor performance. During the next special measures monitoring visit, it is imperative that senior and middle leaders show clear evidence of teachers being rigorously held to account for the quality of their teaching.

The headteacher has a very strong understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The school development plan that she has written is a comprehensive document that sets out clearly the actions to be taken and the intended impact.

However, some senior and middle leaders are failing to ensure consistency in the implementation of this plan. This results in improvements being sporadic across the school and in the pace of change being too slow.

Recent changes to the curriculum have been positive. Pupils are beginning to develop a better understanding of risks associated with radicalisation, extremism and child sexual exploitation. The range of courses on offer in the sixth form has been widened to enable students to have a greater choice when they join and to better meet their individual needs and interests.

Safeguarding across the school is led well. The policies in place, the checks completed on staff joining the school and the culture of safeguarding are well established. The pastoral care team, including heads of years, understand pupils' individual needs well. Referrals to external agencies for extra support are timely and effective.

The governing body has a very limited understanding of the school's academic performance, the quality of teaching and the use of pupil premium funding. As a result, they are unable to effectively support and challenge the headteacher to bring about the rapid improvement that is needed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Too much teaching fails to promote good progress for pupils. Teachers' expectations of what pupils are able to achieve are too low. Assessment information is not used well enough to determine what pupils know, can do and understand and to plan learning which is appropriate to pupils' abilities.

The very clear expectations of what teachers should do within the teaching policy are not followed consistently enough. The quality of work pupils produce and their presentation is not challenged sufficiently by teachers when they are poor. Some teachers' explanations are not clear enough to develop pupils' learning sufficiently and sometimes introduce misconceptions which hinder the progress pupils make.

Some teachers are very strong practitioners. Humanities and post-16 subjects are, in particular, taught very well. In these subjects, pupils show great determination and resilience to succeed when teachers really challenge their learning. Questioning is insightful and probes pupils' understanding and deepens their learning. Pupils are eager to contribute their thoughts and ideas in classrooms that encourage a real thirst for learning.

The profile of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEN and/or disabilities has been raised. Teachers know which pupils fall into these categories and they are clearly identified on seating plans. However, beyond identifying these pupils, it is not clear what teachers then do, if anything, to support and improve their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school site at social times has improved significantly since the previous inspection. When teachers capture pupils' interests they respond positively and engage well in their learning. Pupils generally work well on their own and with their peers.

Pupils have a well-developed understanding of how to stay safe particularly when using the internet. Their understanding of other risks such as radicalisation and extremism is being enhanced well through tutor time and the personal and social development programme. Through the curriculum, pupils' understanding of good physical and mental health is developed effectively.

Pupils' attendance remains below the national average. School leaders have put in place many initiatives to address pupils' attendance including working more closely with pupils and their families to identify any barriers to attendance. However, a significant proportion of absence is as a result of parents taking pupils on holiday during term time.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils continue to underachieve across the school. The outcomes Year 11 pupils achieved in the GCSE examinations in 2017 show that they made very poor progress across a wide range of subjects including English and mathematics. Some senior leaders, middle leaders and governors fail to understand how poor the school's outcomes actually are. As a result, leaders possess an unrealistic and overgenerous view of the school's performance.

Most-able pupils do not achieve to their potential. This is as a result of teachers' low expectations. Most-able Year 7 pupils who were spoken to during the inspection felt that they have not yet had any learning which really challenges them.

The recently appointed SEN coordinator has brought about a positive change in the support being provided for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities. Teaching assistants feel better prepared to provide the individual support some pupils need. The impact of this improved support is yet to be seen in pupils' outcomes due to the change in practice being very recent.

External support

The school accesses its main external support from the Priory Learning Trust (PLT) who have been working with school leaders since September 2017. A key focus of this support has been to provide an additional assistant headteacher to improve pupils' behaviour. This support is effective in building upon improvements to behaviour already made since the previous inspection.

The head of school improvement spends two days a week at the school to quality assure leaders' work. She rightly acknowledges that there is much more to do to develop some leaders' effectiveness, in particular with improving the quality of teaching and developing an accurate understanding of pupils' outcomes.

External reviews of governance and the spending of the pupil premium funding have recently taken place. These findings will be used to understand the school's strengths in these areas and to address any weaknesses through the school development plan.