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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 Julie Carrington, Her Majesty's Inspector and Alun Williams and David New, Ofsted Inspectors to your school on 28 February to 1 March 2018, 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 April 2017. 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.

The school's development plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection as long as the support package to be put in place is agreed by myself.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), 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 (SEN) 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 second monitoring inspection on 28 February to 1 March 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils and representatives of the IEB. Inspectors conducted visits to lessons to observe learning, scrutinise the quality of work in pupils' books and look at pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their learning. Most visits to lessons were conducted jointly with senior leaders.

Context

The governing body of the school was replaced by an IEB in February 2018. The IEB will take over the governance responsibilities of the school until academisation takes place. The school is currently seeking to academise with The Priory Learning Trust in autumn 2018.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You and your senior leaders have taken determined action to tackle underperforming teachers since the previous monitoring inspection in November 2017. Very clear processes and procedures have been put in place to provide swift support for teachers whose teaching is deemed to be poor. Where teachers fail to improve, leaders take decisive action. This has, rightly, raised expectations for teachers' classroom practice and the impact it has on pupils' outcomes.

Most middle leaders have responded positively to being held more rigorously to account for the quality of teaching within their departments. They have implemented a more robust and effective system of monitoring the quality of teaching. Where teachers are deemed not to be effective in the classroom, middle leaders provide short-term support to improve the quality of teaching. While most middle leaders have risen to the raised expectations placed on them, some are yet to operate as effectively as others.

Leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching are accurate. After many joint observations of teaching, leaders and inspectors identified the same strengths and areas for development. Leaders acknowledge that, while they are taking clear action to deal with underperforming teachers, there is more to do to ensure that the majority of teaching improves to be consistently good.

The IEB has taken over responsibility for the governance of the school recently. Members have quickly gained an accurate view of the school's weaknesses and understand their responsibility, and the need, to bring about rapid improvement.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There is still much work to do to raise the quality of teaching to be consistently good across the school. Too many teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve remain too low. This results in the work pupils complete lacking challenge. Pupils' progress is limited as they are not required to think deeply about their learning. Many classes are split between teachers. Sometimes, when this happens, teachers do not take sufficient responsibility for these classes, which results in pupils making insufficient progress.

Pupils told inspectors that teachers do not consistently challenge them sufficiently or enable them to be fully engaged in their learning. Inspectors agree with this. Too often, tasks and work are presented at too simplistic a level. While pupils comply with their teachers' instructions, they respond far more positively when allowed to engage, discuss and articulate their thoughts and learning.

Some strong examples of teaching are evident across the school. These are where teachers assess pupils' understanding effectively and move their learning on swiftly to accelerate the progress they make. Clear routines have been established in lessons since the previous monitoring visit. An agreed and consistent approach enables lessons to start in a calm and purposeful manner.

Leaders have clear plans in place to improve the quality of teaching across the school. The correct weaknesses have been identified and support and intervention have been planned which have the potential to improve teachers' practice rapidly.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils conduct themselves well around the school site and in lessons. They show very positive attitudes to their learning when teachers engage them fully and challenge them sufficiently. Most pupils take pride in their work and presentation.

Pupils feel safe in school and understand how to minimise risk, such as from child sexual exploitation. They state that bullying is rare but have a trusted adult they would speak to if they had any concerns. Pupils speak positively about the school's approach to helping them understand how to maintain good mental health.

Attendance has risen slightly across the school. However, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school, and of those who receive a fixed-term exclusion, is too high. Leaders have clear systems in place for monitoring pupils' attendance and for working with families to provide extra support when needed. However, leaders are not yet using the information they possess to identify trends in pupils' absence and behaviour and to use this knowledge to prevent recurrence.

Outcomes for pupils

You have implemented a more robust process of collecting and analysing information about pupils' progress. Teachers are required to provide this information, which is scrutinised closely by subject leaders. This enables support for pupils who are at risk of underachieving to be implemented swiftly. The quality of information, particularly that which is related to specific groups of pupils, is more rigorous and is being used more effectively to track pupils' learning.

Teachers are more aware of groups of pupils, such as those who have SEN and/or disabilities and those supported by the pupil premium funding. Teachers are increasingly amending their teaching and support to enable these pupils to achieve in line with their peers within the school.

Changes to the curriculum, particularly at key stage 4, have enabled pupils to study a more challenging range of academic subjects. This has, in turn, raised expectations of what pupils can do. Your most recent analysis of pupils' progress indicates that pupils in Year 11 are on track to achieve at a higher level at the end of the year in most subjects when compared to last year. While this is positive, pupils are still not yet making enough progress when compared to other pupils nationally from their starting points.

External support

The main support to the school is being provided by the proposed academy sponsor, The Priory Learning Trust. Consultants and leaders from the trust work in the school to support you and your leaders to develop the quality of teaching and the behaviour and safety of pupils. This work is beginning to have a positive impact as new systems and procedures begin to become embedded. The local authority provides funding to support the deployment of one of these consultants.