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Miss Alexis Bull
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Bull

Special measures monitoring inspection of St John's Wood Academy

Following my visit to your school on 6–7 November 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 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 March 2018.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire East. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2018.

- Take urgent action to make sure that pupils are safe by:
 - establishing a calm and orderly environment where all pupils and staff feel safe
 - providing further training and support for all staff to equip them with the necessary skills to deal effectively with pupils' challenging behaviour
 - ensuring that the designated safeguarding leader has the skills, resources, support and authority to carry out the role effectively
 - making sure that record-keeping is meticulous
 - ensuring that pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through a carefully planned curriculum programme
 - ensuring that all risks are assessed thoroughly, actions to manage risks are suitable and checks are in place to make sure agreed plans are adhered to
 - carrying out rigorous and robust checks on all alternative providers to make sure that pupils are safe when learning off-site
 - reducing persistent absence and improving attendance so that pupils are in school on time every day.
- Meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs effectively so that they are ready to learn by:
 - making sure that pupils understand how to keep themselves and others safe both in school, online and in the community
 - making sure that staff and pupils have an accurate understanding of what bullying is
 - following up assiduously on all instances of bullying
 - providing all staff with effective training and support so that they can meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs
 - ensuring that pupils receive the help and support that they need, as set out in their education, health and care plans.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment so that all groups of pupils, especially the disadvantaged, those who have SEN and/or disabilities and the most able, make much better progress by ensuring that all teachers:
 - meet the requirements set out in the teachers' standards
 - have the highest expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - plan work which pupils find interesting and purposeful so that they develop positive attitudes and essential behaviours for learning, including resilience, independence and perseverance

- plan learning which engages and challenges pupils, particularly the most able, and makes the best use of lesson time
 - assess pupils' learning accurately and set them work which is well matched to their abilities
 - make sure that pupils know how to improve their work and are given timely opportunities to respond to teachers' advice and correct mistakes
 - put in place interventions to help pupils catch up so that all make better progress.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
- establishing a culture of high ambition for all pupils which is communicated to and shared by trustees, governors, leaders, staff, pupils and parents
 - ensuring that leaders and governors have up-to-date, reliable information about key aspects of the school's performance, including pupils' academic achievement, behaviour and attendance
 - reviewing the school's performance regularly and using the outcomes of these reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's improvement plan and hold senior leaders to account
 - building the capacity of the local governing body, including through relevant training and support, so that governors have the skills, experience and expertise to expedite school improvement
 - providing middle leaders with time, resources and support to ensure that they contribute to the raising of standards in their subjects across the school
 - checking regularly on the progress that the different groups of pupils make and taking swift action if any group is not achieving as well as it should
 - making sure that monitoring focuses on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning
 - planning a cohesive curriculum which meets the needs of pupils and enables teachers to build on pupils' prior learning across the full range of subjects
 - ensure that parents receive regular, up-to-date information about how well their children are getting on
 - making sure that the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities is well used to improve outcomes for eligible pupils.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 6 November 2018 to 7 November 2018

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documentation and met with senior and middle leaders. He spoke with the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Adelaide Academy Trust (AAT), the executive headteacher and several members of the school improvement board (SIB), including its chair. The inspector also spoke with the chair of the trust board, representatives from the local authority and a consultant who has worked with the school at the request of the regional schools commissioner. The inspector met with groups of pupils and staff. He observed teaching and learning jointly with the headteacher and scrutinised samples of pupils' work. He observed how pupils behaved around the school during breaktimes and lunchtimes.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been considerable changes made to the school's teaching staff. The interim headteacher was made permanent in her role during the summer term. The headteacher is also now the designated leader of safeguarding. Six teachers have left the school and have not been replaced. A number of teaching assistants have also left the school. Two existing members of staff have been promoted to new middle leadership positions. One of these new leaders is responsible for pupils' behaviour and engagement, and the other is responsible for assessment and pupils' progress. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) for the trust currently oversees the school's work in this area. The school is in the process of advertising for a teacher of science, having found it difficult to recruit in this area in the past. The school currently has temporary teachers delivering mathematics, science and technology.

The number of pupils at the school has decreased significantly since the previous inspection. The local authority has arranged for a number of pupils to join other schools, including those children who are looked after. The local authority has also arranged for pupils who were to join the school in Year 7 to be taught at the Adelaide Hub, which is also run by the trust and is located at the same site as the school. The number of pupils who access the majority of their education through alternative provision has also reduced significantly. There is now only a very small group of pupils who are taught by tutors away from the school site. After the previous inspection the governing body was disbanded and replaced by the SIB. The SIB is chaired by a local headteacher and national leader of education. A number of employees of the trust also sit on the SIB, including the CEO, the executive headteacher and the chair of trustees. In response to the requirement for a review of governance to be undertaken, the AAT arranged for a review of governance across the trust. As part of this review, the work of the recently formed SIB was evaluated. The school has not yet organised the required review of its use of pupil premium funding.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have taken significant strides towards overcoming some of the monumental challenges identified at the last inspection. Leaders' actions have led to important improvements being made to safeguarding and pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. They have prioritised effectively to ensure that pupils are now safe and that staff have a better understanding of pupils' needs. Most pupils have begun to make more progress in their learning, although this improvement is down to pupils' improved attendance and behaviour rather than any significant improvements to teaching. Leaders have, therefore, established many of the essential pre-conditions for future improvement. However, they are under no illusions about the scale of the challenge still facing the school, particularly in relation to the development of the curriculum and teaching, learning and assessment.

Leaders have urgently addressed the inadequacies in the school's safeguarding practices. They have been capably assisted in their efforts by representatives of the local authority and through support that has been organised by the regional schools commissioner. Leaders have ensured that the school site is now secure. They have also introduced systems that help staff to control the movement of pupils within the school building. These improvements have enabled staff to supervise pupils more effectively. They have also reduced the amount of truancy.

Leadership of safeguarding is now effective. The headteacher has taken on the role of designated leader of safeguarding. Her leadership has ensured that all members of staff take seriously their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. She has ensured that considerations for pupils' safety and welfare underpin all practices and procedures. She has also overseen a transformation in the extent to which staff assess and minimise risk. Staff now complete risk assessments diligently, including the risks that are significant for each pupil. Leaders have greatly reduced the extent to which they rely on alternative provision. There is only a very small number of pupils who access alternative provision for the majority of their education. Leaders ensure that they carry out rigorous checks on all alternative providers to make sure that pupils are safe when learning away from the school.

Leaders have introduced new systems for recording any concerns about safety. These new systems, allied to a renewed focus on the importance of safeguarding, have greatly improved the quality of record-keeping. Safeguarding records are now meticulous. Staff have undertaken a great deal of training to develop their knowledge and understanding of different risks. This has helped them to develop a good understanding of the safeguarding risks that are potentially more prevalent within the school's context. For example, they have a particularly strong understanding of the dangers posed by criminal behaviour, radicalisation, different forms of exploitation and neglect. Staff now share an understanding of the extreme vulnerability of many pupils at the school. They are alert to potential signs of abuse or neglect and swiftly communicate any concerns to the leaders of safeguarding.

Staff have also undertaken training that has significantly enhanced their ability to deal effectively with pupils' challenging behaviour. They are now more adept at de-escalating situations. Allied to this, staff now have a better understanding of pupils' special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They use the information contained within the new plans to support each pupil to guide the way in which they help each pupil to manage their own behaviour. They carefully avoid identified triggers that increase pupils' anxiety and follow established procedures for calming and refocusing each individual pupil. As a result, the school is a far more calm and orderly learning environment.

Pupils have been supported to develop a far greater understanding of risk. Leaders have introduced personal, social and health education (PSHE) to the curriculum. This curriculum provides pupils with the knowledge of different dangers, which provides them with the understanding that enables them to manage risk more effectively. For example, pupils have learned about the dangers associated with drugs, alcohol and being online. Leaders augment pupils' understanding through a range of practical experiences and visitors to the school. The police work closely with the school to educate pupils about the dangers associated with anti-social behaviour and criminal exploitation. They also work with individual pupils and small groups to promote the importance of law-abiding and respectful behaviour. Pupils' outdoor learning also provides them with practical opportunities to learn about managing risk through first-hand experience. Pupils say that they now feel safe in school and more able to manage risk out of school hours.

Leaders now work far more productively with a range of external agencies to keep pupils safe. They raise concerns, as appropriate, with children's social care. They also work well with employees from the local authority to improve pupils' attendance, and they follow-up any concerns about the whereabouts of those who do not attend. The school uses the local authority's internet filtering system to ensure that pupils cannot access harmful content when at school.

Leaders have begun to create an ambitious culture of high expectations. Supported by the trust and SIB, leaders have improved the way that they communicate their expectations to staff, pupils, parents and carers. Despite this, the legacy of the school's mismanagement still clouds the expectations of many staff. Staff now have higher expectations of pupils' behaviour because they have seen the improvements that have been made. However, staff have not yet developed high expectations of pupils' learning and their own teaching, because leaders have not provided them with the knowledge, understanding and skills to know what they could, and should, achieve. Pupils' expectations of themselves remain variable. There are clear signs that older pupils are becoming more committed and aspirational. Furthermore, staff have largely been successful in heightening pupils' expectations of their own behaviour. Despite this, younger pupils have not embraced the school's higher expectations to the same extent as those pupils in key stage 4. Pupils' attitudes to learning also vary considerably across the curriculum. They typically have higher expectations of themselves in practical subjects rather than those that are more

academic.

Leaders have made some adjustments to the curriculum since the last inspection. The introduction of a comprehensive PSHE programme has made a significant contribution to pupils' understanding of how to be healthy and manage risk. Leaders have also enhanced pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding through a more systematic approach to pupils' learning in these areas. Leaders have also introduced nurture classes for identified pupils. These groups study a similar curriculum to others, but they spend more time on vocational and outdoor learning. Pupils can choose which vocational course they study at Reaseheath College. They do not have any other choice over what they study. As a result, the curriculum still does not meet pupils' needs and aspirations.

Employees of the trust have helped teachers to improve the way in which they sequence pupils' learning. However, they have not supported leaders to develop a cohesive curriculum that enables teachers to systematically build on pupils' prior learning. Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are not developed across different subjects. Leaders do not have a clear rationale for the development of the curriculum, including how the content of pupils' learning in each subject will contribute to the fulfilment of the school's aims.

Leaders have improved the ways in which they monitor and evaluate the school's performance. They have developed clear systems that enable them to evaluate the extent to which pupils' behaviour and attendance is improving. They have also analysed the systems which have been used to chart pupils' progress. This analysis has enabled them to identify the many flaws in these systems. As a result, they have recently introduced new systems which are beginning to provide leaders and members of the SIB with clearer and more accurate information about pupils' attainment and progress in different subjects. Although there is only a small number of pupils currently at the school, leaders pay close attention to the performance of groups, such as those pupils who are disadvantaged.

Middle leaders are beginning to have a greater impact on the school's work. For example, the new leader responsible for pupils' behaviour has made a strong contribution to improvements in pupils' conduct. Despite this, little has been done to develop the quality of subject leadership and subject leaders remain dependent on the support that they receive from the trust.

Leadership of teaching, learning and assessment remains ineffective. Leaders' monitoring of teaching still does not routinely focus on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Leaders' strategies to improve teaching are in their infancy and are far from being embedded. Leaders are not using any frameworks, such as those set out in the teachers' standards, as a structure for developing teaching. As a result, their strategy for improving teaching lacks coherence. Furthermore, pupils' improved progress is the product of their better attendance and behaviour rather than consistent improvements to the quality of teaching.

Leaders have improved the ways in which the school communicates with parents. Parents are now provided with regular up-to-date information about how well their children are getting on. Leaders have also introduced a system which involves every pupil having a key worker within school. These key workers play an important role in building relationships with parents and keeping them updated on the progress of their children.

The trust's SENCo has recently started working at the school and she brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to her role. She has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses in this area. She has started to improve the quality of pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans so that they are focused on getting the best outcomes for each pupil. She has also begun the process of assessing pupils for potential unidentified needs that may underpin many of the social, emotional and mental health needs that have been identified. The SENCo has helped staff to develop a clearer understanding of pupils' needs. She has also ensured that the support plans that staff use to help pupils focus sharply on the targets and strategies outlined in pupils' EHC plans. Staff use this guidance to carefully support and coach pupils to improve their behaviour. However, teachers do not routinely make good use of this information when planning learning.

Leaders have not yet arranged for an external review of their use of the pupil premium funding. The school's current use of this funding is ill-conceived. Leaders have not ensured that the spending is focused on alleviating identified barriers to achievement faced by disadvantaged pupils at the school. They have also not established objective criteria against which the effectiveness of their spending can be judged.

Trustees and members of the SIB have undertaken much soul-searching since the previous inspection. They acknowledge that they should have had a clearer understanding of the school's plight prior to it being placed in special measures. They are now far more insistent that leaders provide irrefutable evidence to support their assertions about how well the school is performing. They are also keen to observe the school's work first-hand to verify the information offered by leaders. Where information is known to be unreliable because of historic weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation, leaders seek alternative means of verification. For example, they have scrutinised samples of pupils' work at meetings to gain a clear sense of the extent to which pupils are making greater progress.

Trustees and governors have made good use of the information contained within the recent review of governance. The SIB now provides strong oversight of the school's work. Members bring a wealth of experience and a track record of success to their roles. They hold leaders stringently to account. They work with leaders to improve their monitoring and evaluation of different aspects of the school's work. As a result, governance is now far more effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders have not been able to engineer significant improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teaching has improved in some areas, such as English and art. However, the development of teaching is at an early stage and improvements are fragile and inconsistent.

Some teachers are using recent training to provide pupils with work that is more accurately matched to their abilities. Despite this, pupils often complete work that they find too easy. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils. Pupils with low prior attainment often find work too demanding and are not provided with the careful support that is required for them to engage more meaningfully with their learning.

Too much teaching still fails to interest pupils. This is because little work has been done to develop the relevance and coherence of the curriculum and because teachers employ strategies that are not well suited to pupils' aptitudes and needs. These weaknesses in teaching currently undermine the school's efforts to develop pupils' resilience and independence as learners.

Despite this, there are pockets where teaching has improved significantly. For example, the teaching of English is now far more effective. This is because expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving have greatly increased in this subject. Pupils are set work that is more demanding. Pupils currently in Year 11 were entered for the IGCSE in English language at the end of the previous academic year. The outcomes from these examinations were promising and have helped instil in pupils a belief that they can achieve in this subject. As a result, they approach the subject with determination and enthusiasm.

Leaders have not ensured that teachers use assessment effectively to inform their teaching. Teachers are not using assessment to give them a clear understanding of where the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding lie. As a result, current teaching does not do enough to compensate for the legacy of weak teaching. Furthermore, learning often stalls because gaps in pupils' understanding prevent them from accessing the content of lessons.

Leaders have begun to take steps to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Some teachers have benefited from opportunities to moderate their assessments of pupils' work alongside colleagues from other schools in the trust. As a result, staff are beginning to develop an accurate understanding of pupils' current attainment. However, because the improvements to assessment are very recent, they do not yet provide leaders with a clear picture of the progress that pupils are making in different subjects over time. Moreover, these improvements have not been consistent across the curriculum and assessment in some subjects is not rooted in firm evidence of pupils' attainment.

Leaders have not ensured that appropriate action is being taken to help pupils who

have fallen behind in their learning to catch up. Leaders have introduced sessions at the start of the day to help pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. However, the pitch of these interventions is too low because they are not based on accurate assessments of what pupils can and cannot do. Pupils find many of these tasks to be dull, uninspiring and too easy.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have overseen significant improvement to pupils' behaviour. Staff have become increasingly adept at helping pupils to regulate their own behaviour. When pupils become anxious, staff help them to calm down and refocus. Staff work as a cohesive team when dealing with poor behaviour. They use established routines to minimise the disruption to learning caused by negative behaviour. As a result, the number of serious behavioural incidents has declined dramatically. The number of fixed-term exclusions has greatly reduced, as has the number of incidents requiring physical intervention from members of staff. The police have also informed the school that they have had to deal with far fewer incidents of pupils engaging in anti-social and criminal behaviour away from the school over the last few months.

Pupils' behaviour during breaktimes and lunchtimes has improved enormously. Pupils talk among themselves or play games, such as rugby or football, with members of staff. The atmosphere is calm and good natured. Pupils respond quickly to established routines and quickly return to their lessons at the end of breaktimes. The improvement in pupils' conduct at these times reflects the extent to which relationships between staff and pupils have improved since the last inspection. Relationships are now built on mutual respect and trust.

Pupils' behaviour during lessons is more erratic. Pupils quickly become bored and misbehave when teaching is not well matched to their needs. They often adopt strategies to avoid doing work and become irritable towards members of staff. Too many pupils continue to use inappropriate language during lessons. Staff are inconsistent in the way that they deal with such misbehaviour. Some teachers diligently follow the school's procedures for dealing with poor behaviour whereas others do not. When the school's procedures are adhered to, teachers establish high expectations of pupils' behaviour and prevent low-level misbehaviour from escalating. Where they do not, pupils' behaviour becomes a serious impediment to effective learning.

Leaders have overseen a significant improvement in pupils' attendance. They have implemented a broad range of strategies to encourage regular attendance and challenge unnecessary absence. For example, they have introduced the '100 club' to reward pupils with 100% attendance. They have also implemented a methodical system for working with the parents of pupils who are regularly absent. As a result, current rates of attendance are over 10% higher than the previous academic year and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced significantly. Despite this, leaders are acutely aware that rates of absence remain too high.

Leaders' actions have improved pupils' understanding of what bullying is and the different forms it can take. Pupils have learned about online bullying and different forms of prejudice. This educational work has helped to reduce the number of incidents of bullying. Pupils report that bullying is rare, and leaders' records confirm this to be the case. Despite this, some staff are still confused about what constitutes bullying. For example, some still consider isolated incidents to be bullying. When bullying does occur, leaders deal with it swiftly and effectively. A great deal of restorative work is undertaken to rebuild relationships and ensure that it does not happen again.

Outcomes for pupils

Following the previous inspection, leaders took urgent action to support pupils in Year 11 to attain better grades in external examinations. Despite this, the attainment of these pupils was woefully low and indicated that pupils had made very little progress during their time at the school. The majority of examinations sat by pupils were failed. Furthermore, pupils gained only a narrow suite of qualifications. The behaviour of these pupils during public examinations confirmed that too little had been done to enhance their personal development and behaviour. As a result, pupils were not well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Pupils now in Year 11 sat examinations for IGCSE English language in the summer. Positively, their attainment was much higher than their counterparts from the previous Year 11. This indicates that current rates of achievement for pupils in Year 11 are considerably higher than that of their predecessors.

Leaders have only recently begun to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments. As a result, leaders are beginning to develop an accurate understanding of pupils' attainment in different subjects. However, they do not yet have a clear awareness of the amount of progress that pupils have made in different subjects. Leaders' information tentatively indicates that there is significant variation in pupils' attainment and progress across the curriculum. This reflects the inconsistencies that remain in the quality of teaching. Leaders' information suggests that pupils make better progress in art and physical education. It also indicates that pupils are beginning to make stronger progress in English. Scrutiny of pupils' work confirmed this to be the case.

External support

The AAT has significantly increased the scale and scope of its support for the school since the previous inspection. The executive headteacher now works at the school several days a week to quality-assure the school's work and develop leadership and management. Teachers of English, mathematics and science are now supported closely by the trust's lead practitioners in these areas. These teachers also work closely with colleagues from other schools in the trust who teach the same subject in order to develop teaching, assessment and the curriculum. Representatives from

the trust also support the school in other ways, such as in relation to safeguarding and supporting pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The school has received significant support from the local authority's safeguarding team to improve the arrangements for keeping pupils safe. The regional schools commissioner has also arranged for the school to receive further support for its work in this area. This support has had a significant impact on improving safeguarding, the effectiveness of leadership and management and pupils' behaviour and personal development. Support for improving teaching, learning and assessment is at an earlier stage and has not had the same positive impact.