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Thomas Raymond
Principal
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Dear Mr Raymond

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Oasis Academy Arena

Following my visit to your school on 27 February 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in March 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and two groups of staff. I also met with leaders from Oasis Community Learning, who have responsibility for governance, and held a telephone conversation with the trust's chief executive officer. I met with a group of pupils from different year groups to discuss their views of the school and talked informally with pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. I visited lessons in a range of subjects and year groups, together with senior leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator. I visited 'The Matrix', which is the enhanced learning provision for pupils with special educational needs, and I spoke to pupils. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's single central record of recruitment checks, the school's action plan, the minutes of the trust improvement group, the school's behaviour data, and information about the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Context

Since the inspection in March 2018, another year group has been admitted. The school now has 448 pupils on roll, from Year 7 to Year 10. Since the last inspection, 13 teaching staff, which equates to almost half the total teaching staff, have left, including two members of the senior leadership team. New subject leaders have been appointed in science, humanities and English. The postholder for English is due to start shortly. The size of the senior leadership team has been reduced, even though the school has expanded. This means that the team can more sharply focus on specific issues for improvement. There have been some additional changes to roles in the executive leadership of the trust in order to better support the school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders are taking effective action to improve the arts and technology curriculum for pupils. Pupils study art, music and technology regularly each week. They now choose their GCSE option subjects during Year 9. This is so they can experience and learn more about these subjects before making choices for GCSE. Leaders have ensured that curriculum plans are in place for all subjects, and that actions to improve teaching have a positive impact on pupils' learning and cultural understanding. For example, Year 7 pupils understand the features of Australian aboriginal art, such as the techniques and symbols used. They can apply these to the design of their own paintings. Pupils enjoy music, and it is a popular GCSE choice. Pupils value the extra-curricular opportunities to participate in drama and music, but are clear that they would like more activities to develop their artistic talents. Improvements in the technology curriculum are more limited.

Leaders have started to improve the science provision. The new subject leader has ensured that curriculum plans have been reviewed and rewritten, and that teachers use them to plan lessons. Pupils confirmed that they now have opportunities for practical work. Pupils can record results, identify safety hazards and write about what they have done. However, they do not readily draw inferences from their observations or write at length to explain what they have discovered. Older pupils have substantial gaps in their science knowledge because of historical weaknesses in science provision.

Leaders' actions to improve teaching are having a positive impact. Leaders have used the outcomes of the review of pupil premium provision to steer and focus their work. Support from the trust is carefully targeted, and senior and middle leaders work effectively with other external organisations to develop teaching and learning. For example, subject leaders observe and feedback to their staff regularly, and they support individuals with intensive coaching to improve aspects of their teaching practice. Staff value this support. Trust leaders have supported the school to develop and improve its assessment system.

Leaders have ensured that basic classroom routines and expectations are in place

and consistent across the school. As a result, most pupils are focused on their learning, and they concentrate and listen well. Pupils know how to behave and what is expected of them. They generally participate in class learning activities, particularly in Years 7 and 8. For example, in the whole-class reading sessions with their form tutor. Pupils are clear that teaching has improved.

Leaders have introduced 'The Arena Way' teaching essentials, which is the school's framework to improve teaching. These build on basic expectations and routines and aim to develop pupils' love of learning and deepen their thinking. Teachers have strong subject knowledge, and their expertise and enthusiasm engage pupils well. Teachers use questioning to check pupils' understanding, but questioning to enable pupils to deepen their understanding is less well developed. For example, in mathematics, teachers use 'why' questions as prompts, and pupils can justify why they have approached a problem in a certain way. In sociology, pupils have opportunities to express their own views and opinions about the prevalence of different types of family groups in the United Kingdom today. However, in some lessons, particularly in older year groups, not all pupils, usually boys, actively engage in learning. Teachers do not always address questions directly to these pupils. So, they remain on the fringes of the lesson.

Support for pupils with SEND has improved. Teachers use information in the pupil passport in order to make learning accessible to meet these pupils' needs. Subject leaders check on pupils' learning when they monitor teaching and scrutinise pupils' work. However, opportunities for staff to share teaching and learning approaches for this group of pupils are limited. This is because they are not included in departments' curriculum plans. Consequently, the quality and effectiveness of pupils' learning remains inconsistent. The quality of support from other adults also varies.

Pupils who attend the 'Matrix' provision have very good relationships with staff. Increasingly, these pupils learn alongside their peers in the classroom. Pupils are confident and were keen to talk about their work and progress during the inspection.

A new behaviour management system has been introduced, and this, together with improvements in teaching, has had a positive impact on pupils' behaviour in lessons. They usually behave well in class because of teachers' high expectations of them and clear routines to follow. However, pupils' behaviour in other areas of the school is not the same. Pupils' behaviour in social spaces and corridors is good-natured, but over boisterous, and pupils lack awareness of those around them. There are still behavioural incidents in the playground, although these are decreasing in frequency. Exclusions from school remain too high.

Pupils expressed a range of views about behaviour at the school. Nonetheless, almost all pupils across year groups said that behaviour has improved. Pupils said that the new behaviour management system is not used consistently, and that they

would welcome more acknowledgement and celebration of positive behaviour.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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 Croydon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Hallett

Her Majesty's Inspector