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Dear Mrs Lloyd

Special measures monitoring inspection of Offa's Mead Academy

Following my visit to your school on 25 to 26 April 2019, 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 December 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 action 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 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 Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - there is an effective safeguarding culture throughout the school so that statutory duties are met, and pupils feel safe in school
 - governance is improved so that governors fulfil their statutory duties and are more robust in holding school leaders to account for raising standards and improving teaching and learning
 - leadership capacity in the school is increased to bring about swift and sustained improvement, particularly in teaching, learning and pupils' progress
 - thorough checks on teaching and improved guidance equip teachers with the skills necessary to assess pupils' learning accurately
 - the curriculum meets statutory requirements, is used to develop pupils' knowledge and skills across a broad range of subjects and prepares them well for the next stage of their education and life in modern Britain
 - pupils with SEND receive the support they need to make good progress
 - the pupil premium is used effectively to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and children of service families.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including in the early years, so that all pupils make at least good progress by ensuring that teachers:
 - receive accurate feedback on their practice to improve their teaching
 - make accurate assessments and use these to consistently plan work that fully meets pupils' needs
 - have sufficiently high expectations of pupils' achievement
 - implement leaders' guidance to ensure that no learning time is wasted
 - eliminate underachievement and raise standards of attainment.
- Improve the quality of pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare urgently by ensuring that:
 - pupils feel safe and are safe in school
 - all members of staff follow the school's behaviour policy
 - overall attendance improves, persistent absence reduces, and the number of fixed-term exclusions decline.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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 25 April 2019 to 26 April 2019

Evidence

The inspector met with the executive headteacher and the national director of primary from the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). The inspector visited lessons, jointly with school leaders, to observe pupils' learning and behaviour. She scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of the governing body and the chair of the parent and community advisory board (PCAB). The inspector also spoke with parents and considered 21 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been changes to the leadership of the school. The executive headteacher, in post on a part-time basis at the previous inspection, has significantly increased her time at the school. This follows the departure of the previous headteacher in December 2018. A substantive headteacher has been appointed and will take up her post in September 2019. The trust is aware of the need to maintain continuity. Therefore, plans are in place for the executive headteacher to continue working with the school when the new headteacher takes up post. To increase capacity further a new appointment has been made to the leadership team to oversee behaviour.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have worked with candour and determination to tackle the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. There has been an honest appraisal of the standard of education that the school provides. As a result, leaders have a better understanding of the school's emerging strengths and where significant input is still required. Leaders have clear plans in place to improve pupils' experiences, both in terms of their academic outcomes and their sense of well-being.

The trust's decision to increase the executive headteacher's time on-site has provided direction, stability and the scope to develop the effectiveness of leadership. She is respected by staff and parents. Her calm and knowledgeable approach is beginning to establish a firm foundation from which the school can build. Central to this approach has been to build a cohesive leadership team which has more clearly defined responsibilities.

Leaders are starting to establish higher expectations and provide the support and training required for staff to meet these. While the school is still largely held to account externally, there is a growing recognition that leaders need to be autonomous and able to hold each other to account with greater rigour.

To this end, leaders are receiving additional support to develop their strategic overview so that they feel confident to sustain the momentum for improvement. However, at present, action plans for different priorities within the school, while detailed, lack cohesion and, therefore, clarity. Plans are still heavily narrative and focus more on the actions taken rather than the impact of these actions. There is a lack of precision in pinpointing the strategies that are working and which are not. Therefore, it is not clear whether actions are having the intended effect or whether leaders are on track to meet their goals within the timescale required.

Leaders are beginning to track more accurately the academic standards that pupils achieve. The reliability of this information is enhanced through work with other schools, both within the trust and further afield. Leaders regularly monitor classroom practice and the conclusions reached inform the reports provided to governors. Teachers now regularly discuss with leaders the profile of their classes and where pupils require support. However, this information is still largely centred on the attainment of pupils, rather than the progress that they make from their starting points. Leaders acknowledge that the information they have needs to be in a format which allows the impact of actions on pupils' progress to be more readily accessible. The impact of this work to date is, therefore, variable.

The trust provides enhanced support for the school. There are regular trust meetings to review the headway the school is making. The local governing body consists of colleagues who provide experience and the relevant knowledge to ask probing questions. Governor review days are a regular feature of the self-evaluation calendar and the foci for these visits are closely aligned to the school's action plan. The records show that governors closely scrutinise the work of the school and ensure that leaders provide evidence for the assertions they make. Consequently, there is confidence that governors draw their conclusions from substantive information. Therefore, the suggested review of governance has not yet taken place, but has been scheduled

Subject leaders of English and mathematics are receptive to the advice they receive from trust consultants. These external colleagues provide an objective and systematic evaluation so that leaders are clear on the standards expected. There is now an agreed and consistent approach to the teaching of English, phonics and mathematics.

However, not all curriculum areas are studied in sufficient depth. Leaders have begun to more carefully consider how pupils will study a broader range of subjects. For example, all pupils in key stage 2 now take a modern foreign language and pupils say that this is a welcome addition to their week. Nonetheless, important areas of the curriculum are still underdeveloped. This means that pupils cannot build on what they already know and confidently develop subject-specific concepts. Pupils themselves say that they would like greater opportunity to consider subjects such as art and music.

Most notably, leaders have rectified the deficiencies in safeguarding procedures raised in the previous inspection report. Leaders have taken steps to ensure that the school site is secure and that arrangements for breakfast and after-school provision are robust. Relevant training has been provided for all staff who feel confident in using the school's systems to report any concerns. Staff are aware of the need for vigilance in all aspects of keeping pupils safe from harm. They have received training on identifying the potential signs of concern.

Leaders make the statutory checks and follow government guidelines to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. The changes made to the single central register mean that this records all the necessary information, and this is checked regularly by governors.

Leaders work with external agencies to ensure that pupils are well looked after in times of need. Staff are aware of pupils considered to be vulnerable and records show that timely action is taken when additional support is required.

To support this work, leaders have introduced a weekly programme of personal, social and health education at an age-appropriate level. While this is in its developmental stages, pupils know how to keep themselves safe and healthy in their everyday lives. They talk about their 'digital footprint' and how they can keep themselves safe when online. They are less confident on how to protect themselves from those who might try to influence them with extreme views.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has been commissioned for part of the week from another local school to provide maternity cover. The SENCo is knowledgeable about pupils and has ensured that the personal, emotional and social needs of pupils are met. Interventions are in place but the evaluation of the impact of this support on academic outcomes is not secure.

There is not yet compelling evidence that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well enough to make sufficient progress. This is because the emphasis on providing quality first teaching is not yet assured. In addition, there is not sufficient alignment between the strategy for pupils with SEND and other interventions taking place, for example to improve behaviour or to support disadvantaged pupils. Teaching assistants provide support for pupils but tasks and targets are not always precisely matched to pupils' needs. Therefore, pupils are sometimes not able to access the task or do not have a clear idea of what they are trying to achieve. Some parents express concerns about the identification and support provided for pupils with SEND. This will be a focus for the next visit.

The external review of the use of the additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils took place in the spring term. This has provided useful guidance for leaders about the allocation of funding and provision, but leaders are still not clear enough on the barriers that they are seeking to overcome.

School information shows that disadvantaged pupils are attaining better than their peers. However, the assessment information does not make clear whether such pupils are making sufficient progress from their starting points. There is greater scope for leaders to adopt a more systematic analysis of the progress of this group of pupils to ensure that classroom intervention is in place and effective.

The provision in place for pupils and families of service personnel is central to leaders' thinking, given the proximity of the army base. The actions taken are providing well considered emotional support for pupils, liaising closely with welfare officers from the armed forces.

There is undoubtedly a greater optimism about what the school can achieve and morale among staff is positive. Parents, too, commented on the noticeable changes that have been made since the previous inspection. Leaders acknowledge the need to continue this work in the aftermath of the special measures judgement. They recognise there is still some way to go to restore parents' trust in the school and are actively seeking ways to do this. The 'express events', where pupils share their learning with their parents and carers, is one such strategy.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders have made significant improvements to the school environment to create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. Staff in the early years phase, for example, have reorganised the space to support the curriculum more effectively. Displays around the school reinforce important ideas and key vocabulary, as well as celebrate pupils' involvement in school life and their achievements.

Overall, the quality of teaching is improving but significant deficiencies remain. Though leaders have defined 'non-negotiables' and have provided extensive training for staff, there is considerable disparity in the impact these initiatives have had.

Crucially, teachers are not yet sufficiently skilled in applying the newly introduced approaches to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of pupils, particularly pupils with SEND or those pupils who have fallen behind. Teachers' comments tend to focus on the effort that such pupils are making, rather than astutely identifying the skills that pupils need to improve. Teachers do not routinely use assessment to adapt their planning so that pupils' misconceptions are highlighted and remedied. Therefore, pupils continue to make similar mistakes, particularly in the accuracy of spelling and punctuation, and this hampers their progress.

Where teachers provide guidance, this can sometimes be of limited value as comments are not in language that pupils will understand. In addition, though pupils are expected to respond to feedback from their teacher, they are not given the scope to do so. Where pupils are not given ownership of their next steps, it is not clear whether pupils have understood and can apply these skills in subsequent

work. Tasks that are given for pupils to reflect on their understanding are not well matched to pupils' starting points, particularly for the most able pupils.

Where teaching is effective, pupils write for different audiences and purposes, with increased stamina and skill. Teachers use effective stimuli to encourage pupils' ideas and to develop an understanding of different genres, such as rhetorical techniques for persuasive tasks. In mathematics, pupils are increasingly directed towards applying their mathematical fluency to more complex reasoning and problem-solving questions. The challenge now is to support pupils to be able to clearly articulate their thoughts and the rationale they have used to come to their conclusions.

The early years is an emerging strength of the school. The support provided by the trust has led to an improved overview of the progress that children are making in all areas of the curriculum. Teachers use assessment to identify gaps in children's skills and employ this information to adapt the curriculum. The environment has been vastly improved to facilitate this. While standards are improving overall, more work is needed to support the most able pupils to achieve greater depth and to support those children who are not reaching the standards expected for their age.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school environment is a positive place to be and this is the view of all of the pupils spoken with during the visit. One pupil said that staff were 'kind and generous', and this view is reflective of the many conversations that the inspector had with pupils. Pupils' testimony shows that they feel that teachers look after them well and, consequently, they feel safe. They say that bullying is rare but if they have concerns there is someone they can speak with and this will be dealt with.

A pivotal element in creating this positive atmosphere is the promotion of clear behaviour expectations. Leaders have established a common language and approach which is followed by staff. Pupils know what is expected and what the consequences are if they do not meet these expectations. There was no disruptive behaviour observed during the inspection, both within lessons and during social time.

Leaders have an overview of behaviour incidents and respond proactively when there are concerns. For example, changes have been made to the playground environment so that all pupils can enjoy the outside spaces. As a result of a more coherent approach to behaviour management, fixed-term exclusions have dropped dramatically since the previous inspection.

Pupils like to take responsibility for their school. For example, the pupil leadership team are proud of their roles and their involvement in making school-wide decisions. Each week they present a pupil leadership award for a pupil who has impressed them with their attitude or achievement. They take this responsibility

seriously. Pupils say that they enjoy being recognised for what they have done well.

At the last inspection, the high rate of absence was identified as a particular issue. Leaders now have a system to challenge this more robustly and the rates of attendance have improved. Recently, however, this model has not been implemented, which means that the initial gains could potentially be lost. Lateness, for example, is beginning to increase.

Outcomes for pupils

The observations made in lessons and the work presented in pupils' books reflect that pupils overall are making better progress than has been the case in the past, particularly disadvantaged pupils and children in the early years phase.

However, the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching mean that still not enough pupils make the progress that they should. Due to a legacy of weaker teaching, in some year groups, many pupils' skills fall far short of those expected for their age. Such pupils have a gap to close between their potential and their current attainment.

External support

The trust has increased the support provided for the school since the last inspection. The extension of the time available from the executive headteacher has been central in providing the depth of experience to support leaders to develop in their roles. The trust and governors conduct regular reviews to evaluate the school's effectiveness. The conclusions from these visits are used to inform subsequent actions.

The school receives a substantial degree of support to strengthen leadership and improve teaching from the trust. The Gloucestershire Early help coordinator has provided additional support. In addition, staff visit other schools within the trust and further afield to observe effective practice. Staff from partner schools work regularly with teachers in specific areas, such as in the early years phase. Trust advisers provide guidance in English and mathematics, improving leaders' understanding of how to achieve appropriate standards. They have verified standards in all key stages, including in the early years phase.

Leaders are open to this advice but, despite the work that has commenced, they know that this has not yet had the impact required on teaching, learning and assessment across the school. This is now their next challenge.