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Ms Michelle King
School Improvement Director
King Solomon International Business School
Lord Street
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Dear Ms King

Special measures monitoring inspection of King Solomon International Business School

Following my visit with Michael Onyon, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 18–19 June 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 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 May 2018. 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 improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in key stage 3 so that, in all classes, pupils are offered the right level of challenge and support. Do this by:
 - making sure teachers plan work more specifically for pupils who have the potential to reach or exceed age-related standards in English, mathematics and science
 - insisting that all teachers use assessment information about pupils' attainment and progress to plan work that is suitably matched to pupils' needs and abilities, retains their interest and extends their learning
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to respond fully to questions during class discussions in order to challenge them more effectively
 - building on the good practice that exists in some lessons where teachers and support staff vigilantly support pupils to remain on task when working independently and regularly correct errors and address misunderstandings.
- Improve pupils' attainment and progress in key stage 3 and sustain improvements to pupils' achievement in key stage 1 as they transfer into key stage 2. Do this by:
 - making sure that in all classes across key stage 3 pupils make more rapid progress and that pupils in Year 9 are better prepared for key stage 4
 - reducing more rapidly the difference between the standards reached by disadvantaged pupils compared with others who are not disadvantaged
 - improving, with greater urgency, the achievement of key stage 3 pupils in science
 - making sure that those pupils who are capable of reaching or exceeding age-related standards in English and mathematics in key stage 3 do so.
- Make sure that staff apply consistently the school's procedures for managing pupils' behaviour during lessons in key stage 3 by:
 - ensuring that pupils develop positive attitudes to their work and thus improve their capacity to learn
 - applying more consistent approaches to modify and improve pupils' behaviour
 - reducing instances of persistent low-level disruption during lessons
 - continuing to reduce temporary and repeat exclusion rates.

- Improve leadership, management and governance by:
 - consolidating and maintaining stable and secure senior leadership
 - building on the work being done by the strongest senior and middle leaders as the school continues to grow in size
 - making sure that leaders and governors evaluate more accurately the effectiveness of teaching and learning in order to address weaknesses and build on strengths
 - identifying the most important priorities for improvement in the school's strategic action plans, particularly those focusing on the quality of teaching
 - setting out in the school's short- and long-term action plans clear measures of success, as well as stages and milestones, to help leaders and governors evaluate the impact of actions taken to bring about and sustain improvement
 - implementing more robust performance management and oversight of teaching and learning to eliminate weak teaching in key stage 3
 - ensuring that governors are more vigilant in holding leaders to account and have access to objective and accurate assessments of the school's work and progress.

External reviews of governance and of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 18 June 2019 to 19 June 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you, other senior leaders and members of staff. An inspector spoke by telephone to the chair of directors and to two school improvement partners for the primary and secondary phases respectively. Inspectors met two groups of pupils, one primary and the other secondary. An inspector spoke to five parents at school and took account of 13 responses to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, and three letters to Ofsted from parents.

Context

A new principal has been appointed and will take up their duties in September 2019. A school improvement director has been in place since the previous interim principal stepped down in May 2019. This post is temporary until the end of the summer term. Additional designated leads have been appointed to strengthen the school's work in safeguarding. In the primary phase, the school does not yet have a named coordinator for mathematics. From September 2019, the school will be taking on a Year 4 and a Year 11 cohort for the first time.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school is making significant improvement towards coming out of special measures. Since your recent appointment as school improvement director, there has been an acceleration in the rate of improvement in the quality of leadership in the school. You are ensuring a greater level of consistency in the way leaders hold teachers to account, including in the secondary phase.

You are ensuring that leaders are held to account more closely for their areas of responsibility. There remains some uncertainty in the school's capacity to improve further until the newly appointed principal is in post and the evaluation of the current senior leadership team is completed.

Leaders have taken effective measures to address the shortcomings in safeguarding identified at the previous monitoring visit. The number of designated leads has been increased to five, including yourself. This ensures that there is an appropriate level of seniority. The safeguarding policy has been revised and now identifies a lead person for children who are looked after. Leaders know their specific duties, including those concerning female genital mutilation, peer-on-peer abuse and child sexual exploitation.

Leaders take effective action when any safeguarding incident arises. The policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils and for staff conduct are appropriate, as are

those for making new staff appointments.

Members of staff spoken to by inspectors confirmed that they have been well trained in safeguarding. This has been delivered through online courses and assessments, the outcomes of which are tracked by leaders. Staff know whom to go to, and the procedures to follow, should they need to report an incident.

Pupils spoken to said that they feel safe in school. A small minority of parents expressed concerns around safeguarding, but inspectors found no evidence that the systems in place were not fit for purpose.

Directors have worked hard and successfully to improve their communication with parents and with members of staff. No parents spoken to on this visit raised any concerns around communication, except to say that the website could be improved. The school's website still does not comply with the DfE recommendations for what free schools should publish about its careers guidance programme.

The recent staff survey was positive about communication within the school, but over half of the 60 responses were neutral about governance, despite recent improvements. Staff spoken to in the secondary phase were positive about the impact of having a curriculum link governor. Leaders reported that they are challenged appropriately by directors.

Parent governors, including those from the primary phase, make themselves available including at the school gate so they can respond to any issues raised by parents. There are also regular parent partnership meetings and monthly parents' clinics where parents can express their views. The parents who provided responses via Parent View and those parents spoken to during this monitoring visit now think that leadership and management are good. They say that they would recommend the school to another parent.

Leaders know where pupils eligible for pupil premium funding are doing well and where they are not. Their detailed tracking systems enable leaders to identify any disadvantaged pupils who have fallen behind in order to provide additional support. They know that in the secondary phase, disadvantaged pupils are not doing as well in English as in mathematics. Pupils have made rapid improvements in science. Despite the strategy focusing mostly on reading and less on mathematics, in the secondary phase disadvantaged pupils are not doing as well in English as in mathematics.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There is a strong and improving profile of teaching and learning in the primary and early years phases. The focus on improving writing has led to pupils in primary (both boys and girls) stating that writing is now their favourite subject. Pupils have the opportunity to write at length in a range of different subjects, for example through producing diary entries and writing letters in history and religious education. Teachers reinforce the importance of the accuracy of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar across subjects, including mathematics. Their questioning is effective and elicits extended answers from pupils. Planning in primary subjects other than mathematics ensures that teachers are meeting the needs of pupils from a range of starting points. They are using assessment well to plan the next steps of learning.

Leaders recognise that, as a result of a new approach to teaching mathematics in primary, not enough pupils are achieving greater depth. Conversely, a higher proportion of pupils have achieved age-related expectations, compared with reading and writing. The primary pupils who were spoken to reported that they did not enjoy mathematics as much as they did their other subjects.

There is a mix of strengths and weaknesses in teaching in the secondary phase. This is accurately reflected in the leaders' evaluation of teaching. Until recently, challenge by leaders in the secondary phase had not been as rigorous as that provided in the primary phase. This was particularly noticeable in subjects such as science, where it is difficult to recruit staff. This is being addressed by you to ensure a consistent level of challenge of teaching and learning across the school. Teachers who require additional support and coaching have been identified. Already this has led to improvements in previously weaker subjects. The teaching of science, for example, has significantly improved. Subject leaders are increasingly involved in monitoring and providing support to colleagues. They have also arranged opportunities for teachers to watch colleagues teach so they can observe practice and learn from the specific identified strengths of others, for example in behaviour management. There is a greater consistency of staffing now and less reliance on agency staff to deliver lessons.

Older pupils in the secondary phase reported that teaching has significantly improved compared with last year. They said that relationships between staff and pupils are much better. Teachers' expectations are much clearer and consistent. Secondary pupils reported that they especially enjoy lessons in mathematics, geography, art and physical education. The quality of teaching and learning in secondary is not as consistently strong in English as it is in mathematics. It is much improved in science.

Despite recent improvements in the quality of teaching, uptake for modern foreign languages is set to fall in Year 10 next year from an already very low starting point the year before. This means that the school is falling further behind the government's aspiration for the large majority of pupils to take all of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects at GCSE, including modern foreign languages.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

There has been a continued improvement in pupils' behaviour, including in the secondary phase. Teachers' and leaders' expectations are consistent, and pupils have responded well. Very little low-level disruption was seen in lessons during this inspection. Pupils spoken to throughout the school confirm that behaviour is much improved.

There is some over-crowding on corridors and the stairs at lesson changeover and at breaktimes, but pupils are safe and act responsibly. Similarly, on the playground there is a positive environment where all pupils are engaged in activities or discussion groups and no one is left out. There is a strong community spirit among pupils. Despite the long queues for snacks at breaktime, pupils wait patiently and queue sensibly. Primary pupils spoken to said there was not enough equipment available to occupy them at breaktimes.

Although the number of fixed-term exclusions has risen, the percentage has fallen, including for repeat exclusions. This is because of the increased number of pupils on roll. Leaders make use of an inclusion room where pupils are sent if they are disruptive in lessons. Usually the numbers using the room are small, but there was a rise in numbers during the inspection visit. Although leaders keep a register of who attends the inclusion room, there is little in the way of analysis of trends and patterns to identify whether the use of the inclusion room is having a positive effect on persistent offenders. Pupils in the inclusion room are expected to do the work they are missing from lessons. However, they cannot carry out work in practical subjects such as physical education, design and technology, and music.

Although there is very little low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons, a small number of pupils in the secondary phase, mostly boys, have become disengaged. This is evident in their attitude and body language in lessons and in the incomplete or poorly presented past work of absent pupils.

Attendance has continued to improve, but not as rapidly as leaders would like and it is still below the national average. There have been more rapid improvements in attendance for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and for disadvantaged pupils compared with other pupils in the school. The level of persistent absence has risen in the secondary phase, but has fallen in the primary phase.

Leaders are ensuring there is now greater accountability for those responsible for promoting attendance. Plans are in place to appoint a family support worker for the next academic year in order to strengthen capacity to promote attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

The current Year 2 pupils are working at higher standards in reading and writing than the previous year's cohort. This is as a result of strong leadership in the primary phase and an improved proportion of consistently good teaching. However, the proportion working at a higher standard in mathematics is not as high as it is in reading and writing.

School assessments in the secondary phase indicate an improvement in the progress and standards of pupils across subjects, according to the school's own analysis. Progress is not yet as strong in English as it is in mathematics. Progress in science is rapidly improving.

Effective support for pupils with SEND and those who speak English as an additional language ensures that these pupils are making stronger progress in reading, writing and mathematics than other pupils in school.

Disadvantaged pupils are making progress towards diminishing the difference in outcomes with pupils nationally in both the primary and secondary phases, although there remain some large gaps in some year groups and subjects, including English in key stage 3.

External support

The school has continued to work effectively with its two external school improvement partners. They have focused exclusively on teaching and learning and, as a result, much of primary teaching is consistently good. Their reports have an accurate view of where teaching is good and where it needs to improve further. Although the quality of teaching is more mixed in secondary, it is improving securely.