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Mrs Emma Hooley
Headteacher
The Oaks Academy
Buchan Grove
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Dear Mrs Hooley

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Oaks Academy

Following my visit with Julie Morley, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 11–12 July 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 not 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. However, as an exception, up to one NQT may be appointed to teach English only.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive of the Crewe 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

David Selby

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that leaders at all levels, including those of the Crewe Multi-Academy Trust, have a far greater impact, by:
 - accurately self-evaluating the standard of education provided at the school
 - making sure that the actions urgently required to improve the school are effective, sharply focused on key priorities and monitored closely
 - making sure that trustees and others responsible for governance oversee the work of the school effectively
 - embedding an effective curriculum, so that pupils learn with depth and fluency across subjects and year groups
 - managing the pupil premium funding effectively, so that disadvantaged pupils attend school regularly and make progress in line with that of other pupils nationally
 - managing the Year 7 literacy and numeracy funding effectively to enable pupils to catch up quickly
 - providing effective teaching for pupils with SEND, so that they attain the outcomes of which they are capable.
- Urgently improve pupils' progress across all year groups and in a broad range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science.
- Secure effective teaching, learning and assessment, by:
 - ensuring that assessment information is used by teachers in all year groups to set work that stretches pupils' thinking, knowledge and skills
 - insisting that teachers support pupils to raise their expectations and work with more care and precision
 - providing much-needed opportunities for pupils to attain the levels in oracy and writing of which they are capable, across a range of subjects.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
 - making sure that pupils' disruptive behaviour in lessons ceases
 - securing pupils' good conduct around the school, especially between lessons
 - taking effective action to reduce pupils' exclusions from school
 - significantly reducing pupils' absence from school so that they attend regularly.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to see how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to see how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 11 July 2019 to 12 July 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents, including the statement of action from the Crewe Multi-Academy Trust (CMAT). This document also incorporates the school's rapid improvement plan. Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, other senior leaders and a group of teachers. They met formally with two groups of pupils and had informal conversations with others in class and at other times during the school day. An inspector met with the chair of the CMAT and the trust's chief executive officer. A meeting was held with a consultant who provides school improvement advice to the school. An inspector met with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors observed samples of teaching and learning, with some observation undertaken jointly with senior leaders. An inspector conducted a scrutiny of pupils' books, jointly with a senior leader. Other pupils' books were examined during observations of teaching and learning.

No Year 11 pupils were present at the time of this inspection, because they had left the school after completing their GCSE examinations.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there has been significant staffing change, including to the senior leadership team, as well as staff absence. The availability of staffing has had a particular impact in English. More changes to the staffing of the school were planned, and in progress, for September. The senior-leadership, middle-leadership and pastoral teams are being restructured. New appointments have been made from inside and outside the school. The appointments include a new deputy headteacher and three new assistant headteachers.

Discussions with stakeholders are at an advanced stage concerning moving the school to another multi-academy trust. Linked to this, the consultant headteacher who previously worked with the school has been replaced with an executive headteacher from another school.

The school improvement partner (SIP), an educational consultant who gives improvement advice to the school, has also changed.

Work to improve the buildings by replacing old windows with new double-glazed units has started.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Improvement in the quality of education provided by the school immediately following the previous inspection was not fast enough. It has now speeded up.

Before the previous inspection, trustees had decided to seek a new sponsor for the school, as they recognised that a trust linked to other schools rather than a college might serve The Oaks Academy better. The school has required sensitive but firm strategic leadership, while the confidence of staff has also needed to be rebuilt. However, teachers told inspectors that they felt that trustees have little involvement in the life of the school. Trustees have taken some important improvement actions, for example by appointing a consultant headteacher and then an executive headteacher to help the school.

Discussions between all parties involved in deciding whether the school should change its trust are at an advanced stage, with final legal and practical checks being undertaken. However, at the time of this inspection, no change of trust had been confirmed. The long-term implementation of some recent changes made to leadership in the school, for example the appointment of the executive headteacher in place of the previous consultant headteacher, depend on the change of trust being completed. This means that, until any such change is confirmed, there is a risk of further upheaval in the school's strategic leadership.

After the previous inspection, the school did not organise the reviews of its use of the pupil premium and of governance in a timely way. These reviews were only completed very recently. An earlier review of governance had been completed before the previous inspection. However, this dealt more with organisational matters than the strategic responsibilities of those responsible for governance. Many of the actions planned to follow up the review of the way that the pupil premium funding is used are at an early stage. This review also gave the school advice on how to use the additional funding available to help pupils who join the school with weak skills in literacy and numeracy to catch up as effectively as possible.

The trust's statement of action, which incorporates the school's rapid improvement plan, has only very recently been accepted by Ofsted after three reviews. Initially, it focused far too much on actions rather than the impact these were planned to have, lacked enough information about how improvements could be checked stage by stage and did not include details about all aspects of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Such aspects have been strengthened in the latest version of the document. However, senior leaders have decided that the current plan is still not as well structured as it could be. The headteacher has started to prepare a new school improvement plan for the 2019/20 school year. This is sooner than a revision was originally planned. The current rapid improvement plan has helped leaders to ensure that some sensible actions to improve the school have been completed, for example in relation to the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour. However, the plan's limited information about the expected impact of the

actions to be taken means that it is not easy for leaders to determine whether this impact has been sufficient. Significant improvements to many aspects of the school are still needed, including to teaching, learning and behaviour.

Improvement in the school has been hampered by staff change and absence. Such turbulence in staffing has included senior leaders. Throughout the period since the previous inspection, the headteacher has shown a dogged determination to make sure that the school has operated as smoothly as possible, and that it started to improve. Teachers told inspectors that they have confidence in the work of the headteacher. While the headteacher has ensured that senior leaders have taken on responsibility for important aspects of the school's development, these have only been temporary arrangements. The changes in senior leadership organised for the start of the 2019/20 school year include that each senior leader has clear responsibility for well-defined aspects of the school's improvement plan.

The headteacher and executive headteacher have developed a clear understanding of the things that the school does successfully, as well as its weaker aspects. They have been supported in this by the work of the current SIP. Leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate.

Leaders have reviewed the school's arrangements for supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They have ensured that more pupils are supported through education, health and care plans, although they have also established that fewer pupils than previously identified by the school have lower levels of SEND. As a further step to help pupils with particular needs, they have planned for more personalised curriculum provision for some pupils to help them manage their behaviour.

Leaders determined that it was not sensible to make significant changes to the curriculum mid-year. However, they decided that they will reorganise the way in which personal, social and health education is taught from the autumn. They are introducing a fortnightly formal lesson to strengthen pupils' knowledge and skills and develop their confidence and social awareness. These lessons will be in addition to the continuing programme of special events, which will now be more closely matched to the needs of different year groups. At the same time as these changes, leaders have decided that not all pupils in key stage 4 should be required to study religious education as an examination subject.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment remains inconsistent. Pupils' learning depends far too much on which year group and class they happen to be in. In English, for example, teaching for some pupils has been of very variable quality, because a full complement of specialist teachers has not been available.

Teachers of some classes capture pupils' enthusiasm and interest by carefully designing learning that challenges them, for example by using skilful questions to stretch them and build their confidence. This was particularly true in samples of learning seen by inspectors for upper sets in English and mathematics. However, in some classes, teachers' expectations are too low, for example when Year 10 pupils are required to complete tasks such as interpreting very simple pie charts in subjects not directly related to mathematics.

Leaders have provided training for teachers about how teaching can be most effective. This has helped teachers across the school to develop some common features in their work, for example in emphasising important subject-specific words so that pupils can build up their vocabulary. In addition, in subjects including mathematics and music, teachers pay strong attention to developing pupils' speaking skills. Part of the training offered has involved teachers visiting other schools to observe effective teaching of their subjects. Leaders have also arranged for similar activity to be undertaken within the school. However, some teachers are not sufficiently aware of what should be typically expected of pupils' learning in their subject at each age and stage of pupils' education.

Pupils' written work is of inconsistent quality. Some pupils show little effort in their writing, and this is not challenged well enough by teachers. Teachers of pupils in lower sets often provide pupils with writing tasks that are designed to help them organise their work. However, these sometimes do not help pupils to make strong enough progress.

The improvement in the school's work with pupils with SEND has involved leaders working with teachers to help them understand how day-to-day teaching can better address the needs of such pupils. However, teachers do not always use information from their assessment of pupils as well as possible or take enough responsibility for identifying the best learning strategies for their particular classes. Pupils described to inspectors how they learn best when they are engaged in practical activity.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have ensured that the school's analysis of its data about pupils' achievement is more detailed. This has allowed them to organise better-targeted extra teaching and support for any pupils at risk of falling behind. In turn, this has helped such pupils to learn faster and close the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have put a number of strategies in place to improve pupils' behaviour. They have provided greater clarity for staff about how they should respond if pupils do not behave as well as they should. Teachers are now expected to follow clear routines, for example in ensuring that pupils are personally greeted on arrival at their class and settle to work quickly. Senior leaders check that teachers are following these routines.

Despite the new approaches to managing pupils' behaviour, their conduct remains variable across the school. Some pupils understand the rules and are able to follow them and behave well. However, other pupils are not able to achieve this and, therefore, behave in ways that disturb the learning of others. Disobedience and lack of respect, including rudeness to adults and other pupils, are still too common.

When teachers manage pupils' behaviour in classrooms effectively, staff and pupils are aware of, and apply, the school's new behaviour-management approaches. For example, inspectors saw teachers helping pupils to understand their high expectations by using short periods of 'time out' from class to allow pupils to think, settle down and return to class ready to learn. When pupils are directly supervised in their social times, such as breaktimes and lunchtime, they generally behave well. However, some pupils show a lack of understanding of social expectations of how they should behave towards visitors and other adults.

Leaders judge that, in the case of some pupils, their behaviour reflects their SEND and, in particular, their social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. In addition, they understand that their approaches to these needs should be different from how they deal with the overall issues of good conduct and appropriate behaviour in lessons and around the school. They have worked with specialists from local special schools to train staff about SEMH. For this group of pupils, leaders have made arrangements for a new approach to the curriculum and teaching from the start of the 2019/20 school year.

Leaders have needed to use fewer exclusions since the previous inspection. Although fixed-term exclusion rates remain high, a relatively small number of pupils have repeated exclusions, which make up almost half of the overall exclusion rate. A number of pupils with repeat exclusions are included in the group of pupils who have particular SEMH needs.

Pupils' attendance is improving slowly. A team of staff has already begun to work more closely with families whose child's persistent low attendance is an unresolved concern. This work has successfully contributed to the increases in attendance.

A new deputy headteacher has been appointed, with responsibility for matters such as pupils' behaviour and attendance. He worked in the school one day a week at the end of 2018/19 and has developed strategies for use in the new school year. He has developed clearer sanctions for pupils who are required to work out of normal lessons for a period of time because of their previous poor behaviour. In addition, leaders intend that the school's new pastoral team, developed from within existing resources, will add strength to its work on both exclusions and attendance.

Leaders have increasingly challenged pupils who do not arrive punctually at school, with some success. However, punctuality at the start of lessons is not good enough. For example, some pupils show little enthusiasm for returning to lessons after their

lunch break. Teachers' cajoling ensures that pupils move on and eventually go to class, but this does not set high enough expectations of pupils taking enough responsibility for their own punctuality.

Outcomes for pupils

At the time of the inspection, it was too soon for GCSE results to be available for Year 11 pupils for this year. However, the school's internal data indicates that Year 11 pupils have made stronger progress than the same year group last year.

There are other signs that pupils' attainment and progress are becoming stronger. For example, higher-attaining pupils in Year 10 did better than similar pupils in the previous year, especially in English. However, current pupils' progress remains variable, depending, in particular, on how effective the teaching they experience is. In general, pupils make stronger progress in mathematics than other subjects, including science.

The recent review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding recommends that the school takes a more individual approach than in the past towards helping disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as they can. From the start of 2018/19, leaders have provided advice about suitable teaching approaches for such pupils in 'passports' that set out the particular barriers they may face in attaining the highest possible results.

The school's own data about pupils' reading scores indicates that these are rising for pupils included in a programme of joint work with their parents and carers. This is a positive step for the school, because it indicates how involving parents in improving pupils' outcomes can be successful.

External support

The school has benefited from additional funding secured through the local authority to provide training and support for teaching and learning in mathematics and for enabling staff to ensure better behaviour from pupils. This funding is ending so these programmes are ending. However, funding following a similar bid, secured with the help of a local teaching school, will be used to enhance teaching and learning over the next stage in the school's improvement.

The school has received very helpful support from local special schools in developing its approaches to help some of its most challenging pupils. This programme was due to end at the end of the 2018/19 school year.

The trust has arranged support for senior leadership from effective local schools, including by appointing a consultant headteacher followed by an executive

headteacher. Leaders have arranged for opportunities for staff to visit other schools to learn about effective practice, in particular in teaching and learning.

Trustees and leaders have used advice from other external partners. Sometimes, this advice has been conflicting or unhelpful. The current school improvement partner has supported leaders in developing their clear and accurate view of the school's effectiveness.