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8 October 2019

Mrs Angela Smith
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Dear Mrs Smith

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Ferrers School

Following my visit with John Edwards, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 24–25 September 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

officer of the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently address the serious weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements by:
 - ensuring that all leaders responsible for safeguarding, including governors, know, understand and carry out their duties in line with statutory guidance
 - keeping accurate and rigorous safeguarding files, which are updated in a timely manner.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all subject leaders monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning within their subjects, particularly in English and mathematics
 - ensuring that leaders use additional funding effectively, including that for disadvantaged pupils, for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and the Year 7 catch-up funding, to raise the achievement of eligible pupils
 - strengthening the role of governors, so that school leaders are effectively held to account and supported.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and its impact on pupils' progress by:
 - using information about pupils' abilities and needs to plan learning that sufficiently challenges the most able pupils and provides focused support for the least able, so that they all make good progress
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive better support, so that they can catch up with other pupils
 - applying consistently the school's assessment and feedback policy, so pupils know what they need to do to improve
 - using effective questioning that challenges pupils' misconceptions and moves them on to the next stage of their learning.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that leaders and staff deal promptly and effectively with all incidents of bullying, so that their occurrence is minimised and pupils are encouraged to have respect for each other
 - supporting all pupils to become self-confident and resilient learners
 - eradicating low-level disruption in class, so that all pupils can make at least good progress
 - further reducing absence, persistent absence and exclusions, particularly for

disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

- Improve provision in the sixth form by monitoring students' attendance more rigorously and ensuring that all students attend well.

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

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 24–25 September 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal and other senior leaders. Meetings were also held with subject leaders and the leader of the sixth form. Inspectors discussed the leadership of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Inspectors held discussions with three groups of pupils. They also spoke with pupils during lessons and social time. They met with groups of teaching and support staff. Inspectors made short visits to lessons in a range of subjects in key stages 3, 4 and 5. They looked at samples of pupils' work in Years 7 and 11. Inspectors visited several tutor time sessions and one assembly. Inspectors considered a wide range of documentation, including school policies, records of behaviour and attendance and records relating to pupils with SEND. Inspectors reviewed documentation about the school's curriculum planning for pupils' personal development. Safeguarding procedures and record-keeping were scrutinised, including for pupils on alternative placements. The lead inspector met with three representatives from the school's academy council. A meeting was held with the chief executive officer of the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit, senior leadership has remained stable. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Leaders appointed a new assistant headteacher to oversee the school's work on pupils' personal development. Subject leadership is now more stable. New subject leaders for science and expressive arts have been recently appointed. Presently, the school has subject specialists in almost all subject areas. Leaders, with the close support of the trust, have reorganised the school's staffing structure. Leaders have arranged pupils into four mixed-age 'houses' in Years 7 to 11 since the start of the school year. Leaders have appointed a senior tutor and one student support assistant to each house. Over the past two years, 15 new members of staff have joined the school.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

During the previous school year, significant changes in staffing had a negative impact on pupils' enjoyment of learning in some subjects, particularly in science. Older pupils reported to inspectors that they are beginning to feel more confident that new staff will be retained for the longer term. They also reported that they believe the quality of their learning is improving. As one pupil in key stage 4 said, 'Last year I didn't want to attend my lessons in mathematics but this year I really do.'

Leaders continue to tackle weaknesses in the quality of education identified at the

last inspection. They have expanded opportunities for professional learning, supported by the trust. Leaders' expectations of the quality of teaching are higher than at the last inspection. Leaders' strategies to improve the quality of education are bringing about improvements. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and relationships with pupils are typically positive. Teachers' use of questioning in lessons is improving. Inspectors noted this in history and mathematics, for example.

Inspectors' visits to lessons across a range of subjects reflect the variation in the quality of curriculum planning. In some subjects, learning is well planned to take account of what pupils need to learn next, and how they learn. Inspectors saw this in English and history, for example. However, this is not the case in all subjects. In some subjects, pupils are less confident in using the technical vocabulary they need to achieve successfully. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work showed variations in the depth of learning between subjects and between different teachers. Pupils told inspectors that their enjoyment of learning varied depending upon which teacher they had.

Leaders have reviewed the curriculum at all key stages. In line with trust policy, key stage 3 has been reduced to two years from September 2019. Key stage 4 has been increased to three years. It is too soon to assess the impact of this change on pupils' quality of education and their achievement. Leaders recognise the importance of ensuring that all pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum. Leaders are aware of the government's target to increase the proportion of pupils who follow the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. They have ensured that the curriculum enables those pupils who wish to follow the EBacc are able to do so.

Leaders are ambitious in their intention to ensure that pupils' personal development improves, including in the sixth form. Since joining the trust, leaders have begun to put in place several new initiatives. Many of these programmes are at an early stage of development. This means that it is too early to see the full impact on pupils' levels of confidence and resilience.

The new 'house' structure of mixed-age tutor groups is beginning to strengthen relationships between pupils of different age groups. Pupils and staff told inspectors that they welcome this arrangement. Leaders have ensured that staff in each 'house' provide effective pastoral care.

The previous inspection challenged leaders to develop pupils' confidence and resilience in learning. In response to this, leaders have reorganised the school day. They have also devised two programmes which are in their infancy. The 'core studies' programme enables pupils to learn about a wide range of themes, including personal safety, online safety, sex and relationships, and mental health. The school is working towards achieving an award for its work on mental health. However, not all tutors deliver this programme well. Leaders reinforce these themes in assemblies.

The second programme promotes a series of seven 'pledges'. Leaders intend that all pupils engage with the pledge scheme to help them develop a good character and foster good relationships in and out of school. It is too soon, however, to evaluate the success of this scheme.

The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. Since joining the trust, the range of opportunities has increased. Pupils can take part in a range of sporting activities, dance, drama, music, the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the National Citizenship Service. Although leaders track participation levels in some activities, this does not extend to all of them.

Leaders make appropriate provision for pupils' careers information, advice and guidance. They have ensured that pupils are able to find out about future employment opportunities by speaking with a range of local employers. A careers fair is also held annually. However, older pupils in key stage 4 who spoke with inspectors were unable to talk confidently about how careers guidance was helping to inform their next steps. By contrast, sixth-form students praised the quality of the school's guidance programme in supporting their next steps. Students who spoke to inspectors said they were happy with the quality and range of advice they have received.

The culture of the school is being positively transformed. At the time of the first monitoring visit, leaders had only recently introduced a new policy to improve standards in pupils' behaviour. The implementation of this policy, together with leaders' strong visible presence around the school site, is having a positive impact. The school is calm and orderly. Inspectors met many polite pupils who were willing to share their views about the school. Leaders' recent policy to remove the use of mobile phones during the day has been well received by pupils and staff. One pupil reported to inspectors that 'Pupils are now actually talking to one another'.

Overall, pupils' attitudes towards their learning are improving. Most pupils reported to inspectors that school is generally a pleasant place to be. They feel safe in school. They told inspectors that incidences of bullying are now low. Pupils know who they can speak to if they have any worries or concerns. They expressed confidence that the staff in school would sort out any issues swiftly. However, a significant minority of pupils are not punctual to school in the morning. While improving, leaders recognise that further work is needed to ensure that all pupils arrive on time.

Levels of attendance have continued to improve. Leaders have implemented a range of strategies to improve attendance, with positive effect. Leaders have worked well with parents, carers and other agencies to improve attendance. This includes the work of education welfare officers. Rates of absence are average when compared to national figures. The proportion of pupils regularly absent from school is now below average. This is a significant improvement since the last section 5 inspection. Rates of attendance in the sixth form have improved. Leaders' strategies

to improve levels of attendance, together with raised expectations, have been successful. However, the attendance of pupils with SEND remains too low.

Fixed-term exclusions have reduced. The proportion of pupils who are removed from lessons has much reduced since the first monitoring visit. Instances of low-level disruption, however, continue to occur in some lessons. Pupils told inspectors that this depends on which teacher they have. Inspectors' visits to lessons confirmed pupils' views. Not all staff use the behaviour policy well enough to reinforce their expectations. Sometimes, the work set does not sufficiently challenge pupils and they become distracted. When pupils lack the knowledge they need to complete learning tasks, this, too, leads to low-level disruption.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have ensured a strong culture of vigilance. Pupils report that they feel safe in school. They are confident that any worries or concerns they have will be sorted out quickly. Staff are well trained, using up-to-date guidance. They are alert to any potential risks faced by pupils, particularly the most vulnerable. This includes the small number of pupils attending alternative placements. Leaders' record-keeping is strong. Records reflect that leaders work well with parents and other agencies to protect children. They have helped pupils to learn about risks in the local community. These risks include knife crime, gang culture and substance misuse.

The principal leads a strong, stable and unified team of leaders. With close support from the trust, they are unwavering in their determination to raise standards at the school. They have improved the school environment. The principal has further refined the school improvement plan. This plan includes clear milestones by which to measure success. It is too soon in the new school year, however, to evaluate fully the sustained impact of the improvement plan.

Following significant reorganisation in staffing during the previous school year, the pace of improvement is accelerating. Staff morale is very high and there is a strong sense of 'togetherness' in the improvement journey the school is on. One member of staff summed up the ethos as 'Team Ferrers!' Staff and pupils who spoke with inspectors are optimistic about the future of the school. They report that the culture and ethos of the school are more positive than they have been previously, including in the sixth form. Newly qualified teachers feel particularly well supported by leaders in the school and the trust. The leadership of pupils with SEND, however, is not improving rapidly enough despite the intense support provided by the trust.

Governors (academy council members) have received significant training since the previous inspection. They understand their strategic role and the importance of holding leaders to account. Council members have made formal links with leaders across the school to support their evaluation of the school's provision. Council members' records show that they are well informed. They know the school's

strengths and development priorities. Records show that governors are asking challenging questions of senior leaders. They challenge leaders about pupils' achievement and the management of behaviour, for example. Trust leaders have recently introduced expert 'academy council champions' to further strengthen this aspect of leadership. It is too soon, however, to see the impact of this work.

Senior leaders are now working closely with all subject leaders. They have improved the line management and quality assurance processes to hold subject leaders to account for the quality of education and pupils' achievement. Subject leaders are benefiting from the wider support from within the trust. Subject leaders who spoke to inspectors said that they felt well supported by senior leaders.

Leaders now have a better oversight of the progress made by disadvantaged pupils than they had previously. They have a clear understanding of the barriers to learning that these pupils may face and use a range of strategies to help pupils overcome these barriers. A 'student mentor' provides close support for disadvantaged pupils. This support is having a positive impact. The attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils are improving.

Strengths in the school's approach to securing improvement

- Leaders have established a strong culture of vigilance in the safeguarding of pupils. Pupils say they feel safe in school.
- The conduct of pupils is calm and orderly. Leaders' actions to improve standards of behaviour are proving successful. The culture of the school is being transformed. This has been helped by the reorganisation of the school day. Pupils say that they are happy to be at school. The new 'house' structure has been well received by pupils.
- Leaders have ensured that levels of pupils' attendance have improved, including in the sixth form. The strategies that leaders have implemented have resulted in a significant decrease in the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school.
- The pace of improvement is accelerating. The reorganisation of staffing and positive staff morale are strong contributing factors. Staff are increasingly optimistic about the future of the school.
- Governors' oversight of the strengths and weaknesses of the school is strengthening. They have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Weaknesses in the school's approach to securing improvement

- The quality of education, while improving, remains variable. Pupils report that their enjoyment of learning depends upon which teacher they have.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND who are regularly absent from school remains

too high.

- While improving, a significant minority of pupils continue to arrive late to school for morning registration.