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Mrs Melanie McGauley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McGauley

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of The King John School

Following my visit with Kathryn Herlock, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 25 September, 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 April 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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 improvement 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, the chief executive officer of the Zenith Multi-Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2019

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the school follows statutory guidance to ensure the safety and welfare of all pupils
 - working with the local authority and other agencies to ensure that those pupils with the most complex welfare needs are supported well and evidence of this is recorded
 - developing more effective approaches to self-evaluation so that leaders, governors and trustees have a more precise understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses
 - ensuring that all school leaders have high expectations about the progress that all pupils can make
 - making sure that all teaching enables the most able pupils to achieve well
 - reviewing the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders to ensure that they can focus on strategic improvements
 - improving the use, monitoring and impact of the pupil premium and the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium.

An external review of the use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 25 September 2019.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised documents. They met with the headteacher, the chief executive officer of the trust and members of the governing body. Inspectors also met with senior and other leaders, members of the teaching and support staff, a representative of the local authority and groups of pupils. This was a focused inspection. Inspectors focused on the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection relating to safeguarding and leadership and management. Inspectors did not evaluate the extent of the school's progress towards those areas for improvement relating to teaching and learning.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to the composition of the school's senior leadership team and to its governing body. The headteacher has reviewed leaders' roles and responsibilities. External reviews of safeguarding, governance and the school's use of funding to support disadvantaged pupils have taken place.

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

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher, leaders and the trust have worked tenaciously to improve the culture of safeguarding at the school. While these improvements are not yet all fully embedded, leaders have brought significant improvements to the school's leadership and management of safeguarding.

Additional leaders are bringing greater capacity to the monitoring of pupils' welfare, behaviour and attendance. Increasingly, leaders work in teams to share information, for example through the school's regular behaviour and attendance panel meetings. This means decisions leaders take are based on all relevant and up-to-date information about individual pupils.

Regular training has ensured that all staff understand the latest legal guidance on how to safeguard pupils. They refer any concerns they have about pupils appropriately and in a timely manner.

Leaders now have a more secure understanding of the updated legal procedures to follow when responding to less common but more serious safeguarding issues. They prioritise appropriately and work effectively with external agencies. Leaders are sharing information with the police and other agencies so that the pupils who are most at risk get the help they need. Leaders are ensuring that pupils who are educated off-site, including in alternative provision, are safe, and that there are daily checks on their attendance and safety.

A member of the support staff is ensuring that safeguarding records are kept in a well organised manner. This is enabling leaders to quickly identify any new information or action that is needed to promote a pupil's welfare. Safeguarding leaders review individual cases frequently. They work with other leaders to build up a full picture of pupils' contexts, attendance, behaviour and progress.

The trust's Zenith Minds staff are providing counselling and other forms of expert support for pupils who have complex welfare needs. Leaders are drawing on other sources of help for such pupils too, and they regularly evaluate how far it is making a difference.

At the time of the previous inspection, pupils did not have a secure knowledge of some of the risks that they might face or how to minimise these. Subsequently, pupils have learned about the dangers of knife crime and drug and gang-related 'county lines' activity, for example, during assemblies and talks from visiting speakers. Pupils have a secure understanding of these issues now and of how to keep themselves safe.

Leaders have made changes to the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. These mean that pupils revisit learning about relationships, and about how to stay healthy and safe, as they move up the school. Detailed plans demonstrate that more time is to be devoted to this learning in key stage 4 and in the sixth form. It is too soon to determine the impact of this work.

Despite these improvements, leaders, on occasion, do not investigate the underlying reasons for a small number of pupils' lower level ongoing poor behaviour in a timely way. These pupils do not always get the support they need quickly. Sometimes, pupils do not access help because they are not aware it is available to them.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Leaders and managers, including governors, have led a comprehensive response to address the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. The school's improvement plans are ambitious, and the objectives set are prioritised

appropriately. The outcomes leaders are aiming at are clear, as are the responsibilities of those who will work towards bringing them about. Leaders and governors are closely monitoring progress towards the plan's objectives. They have a good understanding of what has been achieved and of what remains to be done.

The headteacher has reviewed the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders. At the time of the previous inspection, some leaders were overburdened. This meant that their ability to work strategically was limited. Individual leaders now have fewer areas of responsibility. Leadership capacity has been increased through additional appointments to the senior leadership team. Teams are starting to be led and managed more effectively, so that colleagues work together and share information about pupils in a systematic and timely way. Trust leaders are working with school leaders well to develop these ways of working further. However, some of these new ways of working are not yet fully established, because leaders have only taken on some of their new responsibilities recently.

Leaders and governors are changing the ways in which they evaluate how far aspects of the school's work are successful. Governors have adopted many of the recommendations made by the recent external review of governance. As a result, they are developing their capacity to challenge leaders. External reviews and governor visits to the school are providing governors with sources of information that help them test senior leaders' judgements about standards. This is helping governors to monitor progress towards the school's improvement plan objectives. Governors are compiling details of all of the kinds of information that they want senior leaders to provide so that the governing body can evaluate the school's effectiveness more effectively. Aspects of this work are at an early stage.

Leaders and governors are reviewing their use of, monitoring of and impact of the pupil premium and the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium. This work is at an early stage. Leaders have started to address some of the recommendations made by the external pupil premium review. They are starting to increase the contact they have with the parents of disadvantaged pupils, to better identify any barriers to their learning and the best ways to remove these. However, at present these barriers are not always well enough understood. Subject leaders have not been fully involved in the creation of the school's pupil premium strategy. The extent to which they are supporting their colleagues to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of disadvantaged pupils is too variable.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders are united in their determination to pursue rapid improvement. They are supporting each other well in making the necessary changes.
- Typically, staff understand what they need to do to help fulfil the school's improvement plan objectives because leaders communicate this well.

- Leaders are seeking pupils' views when planning changes, such as to the PSHE curriculum. This is helping to ensure that learning meets pupils' needs.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- A few pupils receive multiple and escalating sanctions before leaders check whether underlying issues or unmet needs make it hard for individuals to behave well. This delays the point at which some pupils get the help they require.
- Some pupils do not know about all of the kinds of support that are available, including the fact that many staff are trained to talk about mental health. This means that pupils sometimes do not ask for help that might benefit them.
- Leaders have yet to respond fully to the recommendations of the external pupil premium review. Some disadvantaged pupils' barriers to learning are insufficiently understood. The extent and effectiveness of the guidance that subject leaders give their teams about how to meet disadvantaged pupils' needs is too variable.
- A number of the changes made have taken place very recently. New leadership and governance structures and systems are yet to fully establish themselves. It is too early to determine their impact.

External support

- The school is benefiting from safeguarding advice, guidance and training that is being provided by local authority officers. The local authority has also carried out detailed audits of the school's work to keep pupils safe. Leaders have taken forward recommendations for improvement promptly and effectively.