

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



8 January 2020

Mrs Lisa Sharman
Principal
Offa's Mead Academy
Beachley Road
Sedbury
Chepstow
Gloucestershire
NP16 7DT

Dear Mrs Sharman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Offa's Mead Academy

Following my visit with Sandra Woodman, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 17–18 December 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 December 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 action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to 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 funding 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 second monitoring inspection on 17 December 2019 to 18 December 2019

Evidence

Inspectors met with the principal, executive headteacher, consultant headteacher and the national director of primary from the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). Inspectors visited lessons, jointly with school leaders, to observe pupils' learning and behaviour. They scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, groups of pupils and the chair of the governing body. Inspectors also spoke with parents and considered 20 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, there have been significant staff changes. The principal took up post in September 2019 and is continuing to work with the executive headteacher, who was the interim headteacher at the time of the previous monitoring visit. There have been new appointments made to the senior leadership to oversee mathematics and English. A new special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator (SENCo) was appointed at the start of the academic year.

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

Leaders continue to work hard to tackle the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. The appointment of the new principal and the changes made to key strategic roles have been done in a way that has led to a seamless transition from the previous leadership arrangement. Therefore, leaders have maintained the momentum for improvement and have built on the effective work already completed.

There are signs that the strategies put in place and staff training are beginning to make a difference. There have been improvements in how well children achieve by the end of the early years phase, in reading and mathematics by the end of Year 2 and in the proportion of pupils who achieve the phonics screening check by the end of Year 1.

However, the legacy of weaker teaching means that the progress pupils make by the end of Year 6 is still not strong enough. Partly, this is because pupils do not have the elementary skills that they need in both writing and mathematics. It is also because teachers are not yet skilled enough to adapt their planning to meet the needs of pupils. Therefore, pupils' misconceptions go unchecked and they are unable to build confidently on what they have done before.

Pupils are beginning to write with more confidence and stamina. Pupils can write in an increasingly sophisticated way, and they adapt their own compositions for

audience and purpose. However, too often pupils' ability to communicate their ideas is hampered by weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and in their understanding of phonics. Pupils are making progress, but this is not yet sufficient to make up for the shortfalls of the past.

In mathematics, leaders have reviewed the curriculum so that there is a structured approach which both pupils and teachers understand. Pupils say that they enjoy mathematics. They are beginning to be more independent in the way in which they approach mathematical problems. However, teaching does not always cover content in a logical sequence so that pupils can consolidate their understanding.

Teachers are not ambitious enough in the curriculum goals that they expect pupils to reach. For example, pupils' work in mathematics shows limited evidence of pupils using their understanding to reason and solve problems. Where this is evident, pupils are not skilled enough in explaining why they have adopted a particular approach. In reading, pupils are not helped to explore how a writer uses language to create an effect on the reader.

There is still significant work to do to ensure that the curriculum covers the subjects required in the national curriculum in enough depth. There has been some initial planning to address this so that pupils can study subjects such as art, humanities and music. However, this does not compensate for the lack of a comprehensive and logically sequenced curriculum that supports pupils to build on what they have done before. Leaders are aware of the urgency of this and have plans in place to support staff to understand better the knowledge and skills that pupils need in the full range of subjects.

Leaders continue to set clear expectations of behaviour and most pupils respond accordingly. They know what the three golden rules are and demonstrate these in their interactions with adults and with each other. Leaders have worked to embed approaches to managing behaviour. They have established routines and have trained staff to use consistent language which helps pupils to make good choices. Pupils like to receive rewards when they have done things well and happily take on responsibility, such as in the newly established library.

Staff are aware of pupils who find these expectations more difficult to manage and provide effective support for them. Therefore, the number of behaviour incidents and fixed-term exclusions continues to drop.

An important strand in this work is the development of pupils' wider skills. Pupils spoke of 'circle time' as being a valuable part of the week where they feel comfortable to discuss their thoughts and emotions.

Pupils talk about issues that are important to their understanding of the wider world. For example, they spoke of how they enjoyed the recent 'Eco Fair', where they considered the importance of reusing and recycling. Pupils can also recognise

the dangers that are present in their everyday lives. Nonetheless, leaders do not have a secure enough understanding of the quality with which teachers deliver such topics, so that they can target teachers' training precisely.

Leaders have made some progress in improving attendance because they are now following a more structured approach. They stress to parents the importance of good attendance and challenge more stringently where this falls short of expectations. Staff liaise closely with the army welfare officer so that there is a regular exchange of information. This helps staff provide the right support for pupils and their families.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Trust leaders have recognised that members of the leadership team will need support until they are more established in their roles. To this end, the executive headteacher continues to work closely with school leaders. She has been pivotal in ensuring that the school is in a position to move forward with confidence and optimism. To bolster this, a consultant headteacher has been appointed to help leaders to learn from practice from within the trust and further afield. Trust leaders also understand the need for school leaders to become more autonomous in their leadership.

Governors have an accurate understanding of the quality of education at the school through regular visits and discussions with senior leaders. They are aware of the scope of work still required but have recruited wisely so that governors have the necessary expertise. Consequently, governors ask the right questions of school leaders. They challenge leaders to be sharper in their evaluations of how effectively their actions are contributing to raising standards. Governors have worked with leaders to improve communication with parents, to canvass parents' views and to encourage them to be involved with their children's learning.

The SENCo now works at the school on a more regular basis. This, and the training provided for teaching assistants, has led to an improvement in the support for such pupils. The SENCo has improved systems for identifying pupils' needs and has mapped out the support provided. However, the strategic overview is not yet clear enough to judge the effectiveness of the approaches taken. Leaders have not yet sufficiently aligned the plans in place to support pupils' academic and pastoral needs.

Trust advisers provide guidance in English and mathematics, thereby improving leaders' understanding of how to develop the curriculum so that pupils achieve better.

Leaders have taken note of the outcomes of the pupil premium review. Teachers are now more cognisant of such pupils and their needs. For example, some pupils receive additional support with reading to help them catch up with their peers.

However, leaders' overview of the use of additional funding lacks clarity about the difference this expenditure has on pupils' learning.

Safeguarding arrangements continue to be effective. The governing body maintains a sharp focus on this area of the school's work and visits regularly. The governing body makes recommendations and ensures that leaders take action. All staff are aware of their responsibility to be vigilant, and they know how to report concerns. Leaders advocate effectively for the needs of pupils who require additional support.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders continue to develop accountability and monitoring systems to ensure they have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have not shied away from making difficult decisions to improve the areas that are not as strong as they need to be.
- Leaders have prioritised the development of early reading. Through a structured approach to the teaching of phonics, the proportion of pupils who achieve the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 is improving.
- The school is a positive and welcoming environment in which pupils can learn. Leaders have made their expectations clear and pupils say that teachers apply these consistently and fairly.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have not fully addressed the variability in the quality of teaching. Therefore, the progress that pupils make is hampered by weaknesses in their understanding, as a result of the shortcomings of the past.
- Leaders' evaluation of the effectiveness of their strategic plans lacks the precision needed to judge fully the impact of their work.
- The curriculum is not planned well enough so that pupils study the full range of subjects required in sufficient depth.

External support

Staff visit other schools within the trust and further afield to learn from effective practice. Staff from partner schools work regularly with teachers in specific areas, such as in the early years phase. The local authority has provided advice about the programme to support pupils' wider development.