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9 January 2020

Mr Jim Nixon  
Interim Principal  
Ormiston Denes Academy  
Yarmouth Road  
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Suffolk  
NR32 4AH

Dear Mr Nixon

**Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Ormiston Denes Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 11 December 2019, with Brenda Watson, Ofsted Inspector, 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 and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

This was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in June 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 governing body, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2019**

- Ensure that leaders at all levels make decisions that are, at all times, in the best interests of individual pupils.
- Improve attendance by:
  - aligning the school’s resources with its most urgent priority to meet the educational, emotional and mental health needs of all its pupils
  - working collaboratively with external organisations to tackle non-attendance so that all pupils receive the education to which they are entitled
  - ensuring that registration is accurate so that there is correct information about the pupils who are present and those who are absent to monitor the safeguarding and well-being of all pupils on the school’s role.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by:
  - ensuring that all pupils benefit from the good teaching through regular attendance in class
  - improving pupils’ confidence and skills in speaking in a wide range of contexts
  - improving weaker provision so that the pupils can achieve equally well across all subjects.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 11 December 2019**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at documents and met with senior leaders, groups of pupils, staff and governors. They also held telephone conversations with alternative education providers. The focus of the monitoring inspection was on the actions taken to improve the school's safeguarding arrangements and leadership and management.

### **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the principal has left to take up another post in the trust. An interim principal joined the school on 1 September 2019. The senior leadership team has two newly appointed vice principals and a new assistant principal who has oversight of behaviour and attendance. A member of staff has recently been appointed to lead on improving the quality of teachers' planning to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

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

Since the previous inspection, leaders have acted quickly to ensure that the school's information about pupils' attendance is accurate. Regular checks are made on the well-being and safety of pupils who attend courses with alternative education providers. Revised systems are in place to ensure that this provision is meeting pupils' needs, including regular discussions with providers, pupils and their parents. Appropriately, the focus now is on returning pupils back to school as quickly as possible. The number of pupils on part-time programmes has reduced significantly.

Although still too high, there are some early signs that the overall number of fixed-period exclusions is beginning to reduce, including for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. However, the proportion of pupils in Years 7 and 8 who are temporarily excluded has increased this year.

The school's systems to check pupils' attendance, including through support commissioned from the local authority, are now much stronger. School staff are working closely with parents to address attendance concerns. Leaders have a clear understanding of the attendance patterns of different groups of pupils. This knowledge is helping them to identify the things that stop pupils coming to school regularly. Curriculum changes are securely focused on bridging these barriers. However, new strategies are at an early stage of implementation. While there is some evidence of improved attendance for individuals, overall attendance remains below the national average. Too many pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, are regularly absent from school.

Teachers were proud when they told inspectors that 'the culture in the school is changing from one of exclusion to one of inclusion'. They explained how, as part of a whole-school approach to improving the quality of education, subject teams make regular checks to ensure that teachers' planning for learning is well-matched to pupils' needs. A new SEND lead teacher role has been created. This is targeted to help other teachers to improve the support they offer for pupils with SEND in the subject-specific aspects of their learning. Vulnerable pupils are now taught in smaller groups. Developing all pupils' literacy and communication skills is an ongoing priority across the school.

Further work is underway to enhance internal provision for some of the school's most vulnerable pupils. The proposed 'Voyage' programme aims to offer tailored provision to meet behaviour and welfare needs while allowing pupils to continue with important aspects of their mainstream education.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school**

Leaders, including governors and the trust, are ambitious for the school and its pupils. The culture of inclusion is now much stronger than at the time of the previous inspection. Staff are committed to the school's programme of improvement. Changes underway are beginning to ensure that the curriculum offer is more closely matched to pupils' needs and interests, including for pupils with SEND.

Careful thought is given to how and why alternative providers are used. There are improved communication links between the school and alternative providers, including regular checks on how well pupils are doing. These checks are being undertaken to ensure that the programmes that pupils are accessing are fit for purpose. Leaders have acted to ensure that pupils are safe when they are learning away from their main school.

The school's development plan identifies the urgent priorities for ongoing improvement. It gives clear measures of how and when these priorities will be achieved. Leaders' improvement planning is informed by an in-depth analysis of accurate information. This planning is linked appropriately to the learning needs of different groups of pupils across the school. Governors and the trust make regular checks on progress against action plan targets. They are well placed to continue to support and challenge school leaders through their improvement journey.

Leaders acknowledge that, in the past, they have not paid enough attention to the quality of education for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. They know that this has the potential to influence patterns of low attendance and disruptive behaviour. New developments, such as the reintroduction of a three-year key stage 3, aim to secure pupils' regular attendance and positive attitudes to learning. This is so that they can make stronger progress over time across a wider range of subjects.

Working closely with senior leaders, subject teams are checking to make sure that learning plans are ambitious and effective in meeting pupils' learning needs. Regular reviews identify any changes needed in teaching practice. Staff are highly committed to their involvement in whole-school improvement. They say they feel 'empowered' and value the opportunities presented to learn from each other.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The safeguarding of all pupils is a high priority, including for pupils attending off-site, alternative programmes. Strengthened communication links with external providers and routine reviews of the provision over time are targeted to ensure that pupils' learning needs are met.
- The school's attendance information is accurate. Registers are checked regularly to ensure that they are compliant and meet leaders' expectations. In-school checks are enhanced through additional reviews made by governors and the trust. Swift action is taken when pupils are absent from school, including home visits where necessary.
- The support for pupils with SEND is improving. Teachers are developing their skills in planning for subject-specific learning for pupils with SEND. Further improvements aim to enhance the provision offered for vulnerable pupils in school.
- Under the direction of a member of the senior leadership team, new strategies to improve pupils' behaviour are beginning to make a difference. Incidents of fixed-period exclusion are reducing for pupils in key stage 4.
- Leaders and staff at all levels are highly committed to make the curriculum changes needed to continue to improve the quality of education that the school provides.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Despite recent improvements, overall attendance, especially for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, remains below the national average.
- The incidence of permanent and fixed-period exclusion is still too high, especially for pupils in key stage 3.
- Planned curriculum changes are at an early stage of implementation and so have not had the time to make a significant difference at this point.

### **External support**

School leaders have commissioned external support through the local authority to improve attendance and to enhance work with pupils and their parents.