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15 June 2021

Mrs Lisa Sharman
Principal
Offa's Mead Academy
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Gloucestershire
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Dear Mrs Sharman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Offa's Mead Academy

Following my visit with Heather Barraclough, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 25–26 May 2021, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in December 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis

Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 25 May 2021 and 26 May 2021

Context

Although leaders have made headway with the development of the curriculum, plans to introduce a revised curriculum have been impeded by the impact of COVID-19. It is intended that the new curriculum will be implemented from September 2021.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the mathematics leader, also the Year 6 teacher, has left the school. New appointments have been made for September 2021 to fill these roles. In the meantime, the principal oversees the mathematics curriculum.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Together with trust leaders and governors, leaders have set out an ambitious plan for the next phase of school improvement. This has centred rightly on the content of what pupils will learn as they progress through the school. Leaders' emerging plans have shown that they have considered the choice of subject knowledge as well as the order in which teachers introduce new learning carefully.

The support provided by the trust has helped leaders to navigate the challenges posed by COVID-19 as well as to continue with improvement priorities. There is a united front and a shared sense of purpose between trust leaders, governors and school leaders to make the necessary improvements.

Governors are well informed and seek out first-hand evidence to assure themselves of the impact of leaders' actions. Leaders are aware that they have asked a lot of staff and are sensitive to the implications on staff workload. Staff say that they welcome the clarity of direction that has been shared and are starting to see the benefits of the decisions leaders are making.

Currently, some subjects are further ahead in their development than others. For example, in mathematics, science, history and geography, subject leaders can talk confidently and avidly about their areas of responsibility. In other areas, this expertise is not as secure.

Furthermore, teachers are not fully confident in their own subject knowledge in all areas of the curriculum. In response, leaders have scheduled training to support staff to develop the expertise needed to put the revised curriculum into practice. There is still some way to go with this, but leaders are confident that this is realistic and achievable for the planned autumn term start.

This confidence is founded on the continued improvement in the teaching of mathematics. Pupils build up their mathematical vocabulary and understanding successfully over time, starting in the early years foundation stage. Following the return to school of all pupils, teachers identified that pupils were less skilled in number fluency and arithmetic. This has been a focus and has led to pupils now becoming better able to apply their mathematical knowledge to problem-solving and reasoning tasks.

'Stop the clock' assessments are used at regular points in the year to check pupils' understanding. This, together with a developing approach to ongoing assessment, highlights where there are gaps in pupils' knowledge. In mathematics, teachers use this information well to revisit areas of the curriculum where pupils' learning is not as secure. However, teachers are not always adept at doing this in other areas of the curriculum. Therefore, pupils' misconceptions continue. This is particularly reflected in the accuracy of some pupils' writing, notably spelling.

Leaders are keen to promote an enjoyment of reading. They have provided incentives which encourage pupils to read more regularly and from a wider range of texts. However, the impact of COVID-19 has been detrimental to some pupils' learning of phonics.

Although such pupils receive additional support to help them to improve their reading, this is not aligned closely enough to what they are learning in their regular class. Therefore, one does not consolidate the other. Moreover, staff are not trained sufficiently to best support pupils to build up their understanding of letters and the sounds they make. Pupils who find reading more of a challenge do not routinely read books that are well matched to their level of phonic knowledge. Leaders have a programme of support and training in place to address these issues.

More broadly, the support provided for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is effective. Pupils with SEND, including the high proportion who join the school part way through the year, have programmes that are tailored to their needs. While there is a greater emphasis, at present, on pupils' emotional needs, there is a shift towards looking at pupils' academic needs more closely. Leaders have also improved the involvement of parents, carers and pupils in the formation of support plans and are keen to progress these further.

Staff have made great strides in creating a learning environment which is calm and supportive. Omar, the school mascot, is much loved by pupils and serves to reinforce the school's values and expectations. Pupils told us that teachers deal with incidents of poor behaviour well. They say that staff encourage them to learn from their actions. This approach means that pupils are better able to manage their own emotions and make good choices when sorting out disagreements with their friends. Consequently, incidents of poor behaviour have reduced and attendance continues to improve.

Alongside this, staff have been vigilant about pupils' well-being. The family liaison officer works closely with the families of armed services personnel to meet their particular circumstances. For all pupils, leaders have continued with the regular pupil 'check-ins' which began during the partial closure of the school. This has been pivotal in identifying pupils' emotional and welfare needs to which staff respond sensitively and effectively.

Additional support

School leaders have benefited from the advice given by headteachers from other schools within the trust. These 'system leaders' have been assigned to the school to provide additional guidance. School leaders are also drawing on the trust's resources and expertise to plan the revised curriculum, reorganise classes and build staffing capacity to secure further improvement.

Evidence

During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders and staff. Inspectors also met with leaders from the multi-academy trust and the chair of governors. Inspectors reviewed school documents, including curriculum plans, and looked at examples of pupils' work. Inspectors visited lessons, met with a group of pupils and listened to pupils read with an adult. Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the staff questionnaire.