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Emma Wilson-Downes
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Dear Mrs Wilson-Downes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Felixstowe School

Following my visit with Kim Hall, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), Andrew Hemmings, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), Cindy Impey, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and Stef Lipinski, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 23 and 24 June 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2017. 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Having considered 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 governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Unity Schools Partnership multi-academy trust (MAT), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Richard Kueh
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 23 June 2021 and 24 June 2021

Context

The school became subject to special measures in November 2017. The school joined the Unity Schools Partnership at the beginning of September 2019 from a different MAT. The headteacher left in September 2019 and the current headteacher started in October 2019. An executive headteacher worked at the school between September 2019 and December 2020. A special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) started in March 2020. An assistant headteacher joined in September 2020. In December 2020, a deputy headteacher with responsibility for safeguarding left the school and a new deputy headteacher was appointed. Some subject leaders have started very recently. 19 new staff members are due to join the school in September 2021, including a number of early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders do not have accurate oversight of pupils' safeguarding needs. The multiple systems for recording concerns are not understood well by the staff who use them. The information stored on these systems is not reviewed collectively or cross-referenced by leaders. Consequently, leaders are not identifying or taking all reasonable action to reduce the risks to the most vulnerable pupils in line with statutory guidance, including those not accessing education on the school site routinely. As a result, leaders do not act quickly enough to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils get the support they need.

New leaders have made some improvements to safeguarding systems in the school, most notably supporting pupils to report their concerns quickly. Pupils who spoke to inspectors agree that this work is increasing their confidence in staff's ability to deal with their concerns when they arise. However, the work of these new leaders is in its infancy.

Since her arrival in 2019, the headteacher, supported by the trust, has reorganised leadership across the school. The focus of her new leadership team has been to increase and improve the breadth and quality of the school curriculum. This year, a new curriculum has been introduced across all subjects.

Despite this work, there are some areas of the curriculum in which pupils still receive a poor-quality subject education. For example, senior leaders have identified that there is an unacceptable standard of religious education (RE), and they are taking actions to build a more suitable RE curriculum, using the locally agreed syllabus. Developments in English and mathematics, although now moving more rapidly, have been too slow. In English, the curriculum is not yet taught well because the subject leader is new and has not yet trained staff. In some English lessons, pupils' behaviour is poorer than others because some teachers do not

adapt their teaching according to the needs of the pupils they teach. In mathematics, senior leaders and subject leaders give differing accounts about the rationale and future of the mathematics curriculum. As a result, leaders' actions have not secured rapid improvements in mathematics.

Some subjects are further ahead in the implementation of this curriculum than others. For example, in subjects such as science, art, drama and history, leaders have structured and sequenced the curriculum so that pupils have the opportunity to revisit important knowledge and concepts routinely, in an increasingly complex way.

Where curriculum planning is weaker, teachers are not confident or effective in meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Since her arrival in March 2020, the SENCO has reviewed pupils' specific needs, so that she can provide staff with more detailed information about how to support pupils. However, training for staff and leaders' checks on how well staff are supporting pupils with SEND to access the curriculum are still very new.

Current provision for the large numbers of pupils who are not yet able to read proficiently is not sufficiently robust. Too many pupils cannot read well enough to access the secondary curriculum, and leaders' monitoring is not making in-roads into improving this significant issue in a timely way.

Leaders' actions have secured a calmer environment for pupils to learn. Pupils and staff agree that behaviour has markedly improved. However, some staff struggle to implement the school's behaviour policy effectively and consistently. There remains a high number of pupils who are sent to the school's inclusion room, without this making any significant difference to their behaviour. These pupils often complete little work during the time in the inclusion room, and so they also miss significant amounts of education. Additionally, the use of fixed period exclusions for pupils remains high.

Pupils feel that the school is gradually becoming more respectful and tolerant of people of different lifestyles, beliefs and views. Some pupils are still concerned about bullying and whether teachers will respond in swift ways. A majority of pupils think that leaders and teachers do more to deal with bullying, and they talk about the work of the pupil voice group called 'something gets done'.

The local governing body has only recently begun to ask important questions about the improvements to the school's curriculum. Before this, governors did not challenge senior leaders sufficiently about the new curriculum. Governors' evaluation of improvements to the school is not accurate because they are not clear about the urgent changes that need to take place, for example improvements to safeguarding arrangements.

The school should take further action to:

- Urgently address the serious weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements by ensuring that staff record all incidents in the correct way, and in a timely manner. Leaders should have sufficient oversight of these incidents to be able to take effective action to protect the most vulnerable pupils, including making timely referrals to appropriate external agencies.
- Ensure that senior leaders rapidly build on recent improvements to the curriculum in order to ensure that pupils are accessing a well-sequenced and well-taught curriculum, especially in English and mathematics. Leaders should also ensure that these improvements enable pupils who need additional support to catch up, including those who are in the early stages of reading and those with SEND.

Additional support

The MAT has supported recruitment and training of new staff to both the leadership and subject leadership in the school. The trust has also provided a lead practitioner to support subject leaders in the production and development of the subject curriculums. The trust recognises the need for support in subjects and is planning to add this additional capacity in September 2021.

The trust's monitoring of safeguarding in the school has not been sufficiently precise and has not led to enough challenge around leaders' actions to keep vulnerable pupils safe.

Evidence

We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the MAT's chief executive officer, the trust's director of secondary education, pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance, and spoke with a representative of the local authority for safeguarding. We spoke with parents and considered the 206 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. We also considered the 50 responses to the survey for staff.