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Lisa Sharman
Principal
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Dear Lisa Sharman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Offa's Mead Academy

Following my visit to your school on 23 and 24 November 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 second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance 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 early career teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Academies Enterprise Trust 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 23 November 2021 and 24 November 2021

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, the school has made three new teaching staff appointments.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders have maintained a relentless focus on introducing a revised curriculum, spanning from the early years foundation stage to Year 6. While some subjects are further ahead in development than others, pupils now follow all subjects of the national curriculum. This has been instrumental in improving the quality of education that pupils receive. Leaders have liaised extensively with external curriculum experts to ensure that continued improvement is sustainable. However, as this work is in its infancy, pupils are not yet able to demonstrate that they can retain important knowledge over the longer term. Leaders are developing the approach to assessment in the wider curriculum to check that this is so.

Curriculum plans are devised carefully to support pupils to learn important subject content in a logical order. This is underpinned by an emphasis on making sure that pupils understand key subject-specific vocabulary. This enables pupils to talk about what they have learned with confidence. Pupils say that they have enjoyed learning about ideas in greater depth. For example, pupils spoke knowledgeably and enthusiastically about how rivers flow and about their research on the cracking of the Enigma code.

Trust leaders, governors and school leaders work together effectively. They remain uncompromising in their ambition for pupils at the school. Trust leaders have provided an objective viewpoint to evaluate whether leaders' actions are leading to the improvements necessary. Governors are supportive but also pose effective challenge to school leaders. They have a comprehensive understanding of the work of the school. They are proud of the work that has been completed to date but are realistic and accurate in what is still left to do.

Staff say that workload is high because of the newly introduced curriculum but appreciate that this is necessary. They say leaders are supportive and have given them the training they need to familiarise themselves with the subject knowledge required. Subject leaders support their colleagues and check that the curriculum is put in place as intended.

Since the previous monitoring visit, leaders have revamped the teaching of early reading. There is now a well understood and consistent approach, which supports pupils to build up their understanding of phonics. Staff have had extensive training, which has given them the expertise they need. As a result, children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 are becoming increasingly adept at identifying letters and the sounds that they make. Furthermore, the books pupils read are matched well to the sounds they are

learning. Overall, this is a successful approach but there remain some pupils who still find reading a challenge. Leaders have used assessment well to identify where this is the case, so that further support can be provided.

Due to previous weaknesses, there remain gaps in key stage 2 pupils' ability to construct sentences and in their understanding of phonics. The latter has contributed to the errors in spelling evident in pupils' work. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 now have regular curriculum time to practise their use of phonics. Pupils recognise that this is helping them. There are early signs that pupils can identify for themselves where they have made spelling errors and correct them accordingly.

Staff have successfully established a love of reading at the school. Pupils read both regularly as a class and independently. Pupils spoke spontaneously about the books they have read and make recommendations to others. Staff try to bring stories to life for pupils. For example, children in the Reception Year visited the forest to support their reading of 'The Gruffalo'. Older pupils take responsibility for the new library as part of the 'Book Worm' club.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are cared for well. The support in place helps them to manage school life successfully. Staff provide a warm, nurturing environment, where pupils feel safe and valued. Support plans are now more specific to pupils' academic needs. However, there is variability in how well strategies to support pupils' needs are employed in the classroom.

Staff are knowledgeable about pupils and their family situations. Where necessary, leaders work with external agencies to advocate for pupils who are vulnerable. Leaders' strategies to promote the importance of attendance are beginning to pay dividends. Staff are also sensitive to the particular circumstances of children of armed services personnel. The family liaison officer provides an effective link with the nearby army barracks.

There are many positive conversations that happen, both in the classroom and in the corridor. Staff listen attentively to pupils. This gives pupils confidence to engage in conversation. Pupils take pride in the responsibility that staff give them. For example, pupils take an active part in many aspects of school life, such as eco-ambassadors and through involvement in the school council.

Expectations of how pupils should behave towards each other are well established. Staff praise pupils routinely for what they have done well. Those pupils who need additional help to manage their emotions are given the support they need to do so. They are encouraged to reflect on how their actions have affected others.

Staff expect pupils to be 'big hearted' towards one another. Pupils say that 'everyone knows everyone'. This helps them, not only to feel safe, but also encourages them to watch out for each other. Pupils new to the school say that they were readily welcomed into the school community.

Additional support

Trust leaders have continued to work closely with school leaders. They have provided access to the resources and external expertise needed to support the teaching of reading and the development of the wider curriculum. Leaders work with 'consultant headteachers' from other schools within the trust who provide additional support and guidance.

Evidence

During the inspection, the inspector held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders and staff. The inspector also met with leaders from the multi-academy trust and the chair of governors. The inspector reviewed school documents, including curriculum plans and looked at examples of pupils' work. The inspector visited lessons, met with groups of pupils and listened to pupils read with an adult.