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Helen Kent
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Dear Mrs Kent

Special measures monitoring inspection of King Solomon International Business School

Following my visit with Julie Griffiths, Paul Longden and Martin Spoor, Ofsted Inspectors (OI) to your school on 7 and 8 December 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 May 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. We discussed the ongoing 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 those responsible for governance are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of directors, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2018

- Improve the quality of teaching in key stage 3 so that, in all classes, pupils are offered the right level of challenge and support. Do this by:
 - making sure teachers plan work more specifically for pupils who have the potential to reach or exceed age-related standards in English, mathematics and science
 - insisting that all teachers use assessment information about pupils' attainment and progress to plan work that is suitably matched to pupils' needs and abilities, retains their interest and extends their learning
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to respond fully to questions during class discussions in order to challenge them more effectively
 - building on the good practice that exists in some lessons where teachers and support staff vigilantly support pupils to remain on task when working independently and regularly correct errors and address misunderstandings.
- Improve pupils' attainment and progress in key stage 3 and sustain improvements to pupils' achievement in key stage 1 as they transfer into key stage 2. Do this by:
 - making sure that in all classes across key stage 3 pupils make more rapid progress and that pupils in Year 9 are better prepared for key stage 4
 - reducing more rapidly the difference between the standards reached by disadvantaged pupils compared with others who are not disadvantaged
 - improving, with greater urgency, the achievement of key stage 3 pupils in science
 - making sure that those pupils who are capable of reaching or exceeding age-related standards in English and mathematics in key stage 3 do so.
- Make sure that staff apply consistently the school's procedures for managing pupils' behaviour during lessons in key stage 3 by:
 - ensuring that pupils develop positive attitudes to their work and thus improve their capacity to learn
 - applying more consistent approaches to modify and improve pupils' behaviour
 - reducing instances of persistent low-level disruption during lessons
 - continuing to reduce temporary and repeat exclusion rates.
- Improve leadership, management and governance by:
 - consolidating and maintaining stable and secure senior leadership
 - building on the work being done by the strongest senior and middle leaders as the school continues to grow in size
 - making sure that leaders and governors evaluate more accurately the effectiveness of teaching and learning in order to address weaknesses and build on strengths

- identifying the most important priorities for improvement in the school's strategic action plans, particularly those focusing on the quality of teaching
- setting out in the school's short- and long-term action plans clear measures of success, as well as stages and milestones, to help leaders and governors evaluate the impact of actions taken to bring about and sustain improvement
- implementing more robust performance management and oversight of teaching and learning to eliminate weak teaching in key stage 3
- ensuring that governors are more vigilant in holding leaders to account and have access to objective and accurate assessments of the school's work and progress.

External reviews of governance and of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 7 December to 8 December 2021

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit in June 2021, the executive headteacher has announced her retirement at the end of the autumn term 2021. The head of secondary will be leaving at February half term 2022. At the time of the inspection visit, arrangements for an interim executive headteacher from January 2022 had not been ratified by the governing body. The executive project lead (who was previously co-executive headteacher) has left the school.

Two co-chairs were appointed to lead the governing body in the autumn term 2021. Governors have agreed to apply to join a multi-academy trust.

Leaders have continued to expand the size of the leadership team with the appointment of additional assistant headteachers, including an assistant head for the curriculum.

The school's nominated school improvement partner (SIP) will cease its involvement with the school from January 2022.

The school has undergone a safeguarding review conducted by the SIP, and an external review of governance which had not been published at the time of the visit.

The school has faced considerable disruption due to staff and pupil absences caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Five teaching staff were absent, due to the pandemic, during the inspection. The teachers responsible for Spanish and geography in the secondary phase were among the staff absent. Three senior leaders in the primary and secondary phases were absent immediately prior to the inspection.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders have worked tirelessly in the context of the pandemic to support families and children affected. The school community has been especially hard hit. Parents have been overwhelmingly positive about the support and care their children have received from staff, especially in the primary phase.

The current leadership has brought a longer period of stability than previously, but the school is now entering another period of uncertainty. There are further changes of leadership anticipated with two of the three senior leaders departing. Over time, there have been too many changes of leadership, poor decisions and changes of direction which have hampered the school's progress towards the removal of special measures. The senior leadership team has continued to expand. This has not brought clarity on roles and responsibilities. Leaders have struggled to address the curriculum shortcomings which remain in the secondary phase. There is a lack of accountability regarding who is responsible for oversight of the curriculum, especially when there is only one teacher for a subject and they are not a subject leader.

Leaders do not feel empowered to take strategic decisions and are not always aware of financial decisions taken, for example regarding the governors' allocation of additional funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Governors are divided in their response to the unpublished external review of governance, and do not have sufficient awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum.

There are shortages of staff to teach in humanities. There is insufficient support for pupils with SEND and those learning English as an additional language (EAL). In addition, there is no tuition for sixth formers retaking English and mathematics GCSE.

Increased monitoring and scrutiny of pupils' work has not led to demonstratable improvements in provision for pupils with SEND, those learning EAL and low-attaining pupils.

In some secondary subjects, the lowest of the three sets contains the most pupils and is growing in size. New arrivals from overseas and in-year school transfers are invariably placed in these lower sets if they are at an early stage of learning English or have SEND. Teachers have not had sufficient training and preparation to support pupils with SEND and those learning EAL. It is not possible for pupils to move into higher sets in subjects where there is only one teacher teaching all the sets as a result of the way the timetable is structured. The large lowest sets do not have sufficient support available. In history and geography for example, pupils are consistently set work they cannot access without support. Where teachers are required to teach their second subject, they are allocated to the lowest sets.

Curriculum decisions are too often made to accommodate the current staff employed rather than in the best interests of the pupils. For example, there is a narrower range of options at GCSE in subjects where staff are not available. The imbalance in the number of

geography and history lessons taught in Years 7, 8 and 9 is down to the staffing structure. Similarly, the decision to switch from teaching French in primary phase to teaching Spanish in the secondary phase reflects staff availability.

Leaders in the primary phase have made improvements to develop the culture of reading, in particular by trying to engage parents at home through 'Bug Club' and providing additional resources. Staff read to children daily to help develop a love of reading. The support for pupils with SEND is not leading to enough of these pupils making sufficient progress to catch up with their reading.

Enthusiastic teaching staff implement the primary curriculum well using engaging resources in English. The secondary curriculum is focused on learning the skills required to promote attainment at GCSE. Pupils enjoy their English lessons and said that these help them in other subjects. However, at times, teachers set work in secondary English which is not well matched to the needs of pupils learning EAL.

Leaders have a secure understanding of developing a sequenced curriculum in secondary mathematics. They know the importance of pupils understanding fully before they are ready for the next challenge. They know how to adapt the curriculum in greater depth for high-attaining pupils. At times, pupils in lower sets find their work is too easy. Teachers are not always able to distinguish between pupils who have misconceptions or have got stuck, and pupils who are ready to move on to the next stage in learning.

Where there are new leaders or teachers, the curriculum is in the early stages of development, for example in art and design and in music. Training for non-specialists to teach art and design in primary is underdeveloped. The contribution of music to the wider curriculum is beginning to flourish with the re-establishment of choirs in the primary phase and the introduction of a band in the secondary phase. There are a number of opportunities for pupils to learn a musical instrument. Primary and secondary phases have a dedicated music room.

Curriculum planning for the transition from primary to secondary is variable. It is less developed in subjects such as art and design, geography and history. Transition planning is stronger in subjects such as mathematics, where there is a curriculum leader in both phases. It is developing in music, where leaders are collaborating together.

Most pupils spoken to agreed that behaviour has improved, especially in lessons where staffing is stable. There are still pockets of poor behaviour in some classes where there are cover teachers, including in geography, science and business studies. High levels of staff absence result in an increase in cover staff and an increase in the number of recorded behaviour incidents. The number of suspensions has risen for older pupils, yet fallen for younger ones. New procedures have raised expectations of behaviour and lowered the threshold for exclusion. Incidents of repeat offending are very rare.

Persistent absence remains a challenge for the school. Although rates of COVID-related illnesses in pupils are relatively low at present, many are kept off school for displaying

similar symptoms or where there is fear of the virus. Leaders have worked hard to improve attendance rates for groups including pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils. Pupil punctuality is in part hampered by the long journeys to school that pupils undertake. Pupils come from a wide area across the city and from other local authorities because of the unique status of the school.

The school caters well for pupils with diverse backgrounds. This was seen in the strong relationships pupils have with each other, and the school's efforts to ensure that the curriculum reflects its school community. There are after-school activities in sport, but otherwise opportunities are more limited in the secondary phase. Pupils can take part in social action such as a community cake-bake sale. Pupils in Year 10 have had limited careers guidance so far this academic year, although it was provided in Year 9.

Most pupils reported that they feel safe. Their views as to the extent to which bullying happens varied from 'a lot' to 'rarely', although all agreed that it was dealt with well when reported. Records show that leaders follow up assiduously on all reported cases. Girls spoken to had mixed views as to whether they would report what they regarded as 'banter' or 'jokey behaviour' from boys. Leaders take the issue seriously and record and follow up incidents, including child sexual exploitation, thoroughly. Staff have received training on the issue, but not all staff spoken to could recall the content in any detail. Following a review of safeguarding, leaders have put measures in place to address previously identified concerns. Pupils are not taken off roll until leaders are fully satisfied that they are placed in another education setting.

Managing workload has been a struggle with staff covering for absent colleagues. Three quarters of staff who responded to the survey thought leaders were responsive to this, for example through reducing demands for marking. However, others reported an increase in workload as a result of having to set work for cover staff, cover additional classes themselves and take on extra duties.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders should ensure that setting arrangements are urgently reviewed to ensure that low-attaining pupils, pupils with SEND and those learning EAL are not put at a disadvantage because of them.

Additional support

School leaders and governors have responded positively to support and challenge from an external partner. Their review of safeguarding has ensured that the school is now meeting these requirements. Findings from the recent external review of governance have not yet been shared. Regular reports have enabled school leaders to identify the strengths as well as the barriers impeding further progress. However, leaders have been slow to respond to recommendations concerning the secondary curriculum and clarity on leadership roles and responsibilities. The ending of the partnership and external support, which leaders have

relied on, casts doubt on the school's capacity to improve further until future support arrangements are in place.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the heads of the secondary and primary phases, other senior leaders and members of staff. An inspector spoke remotely to the co-chairs and the outgoing chair of the governing body. Inspectors met two members from the multi-academy trust providing additional support. They met groups of pupils from the primary and secondary phases. An inspector met a representative from a local football academy.

Inspectors focused in depth on English, mathematics, science, early reading, modern foreign languages, geography, history, music, and art and design. It was only possible to visit a very limited number of lessons in the secondary phase, as pupils were on an assessment week.

Inspectors spoke to parents from the primary phase at the start of the school day. They took account of responses to the survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the Parent View free-text responses. They also took account of responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey.