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Valerie Rose
Principal
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Dear Mrs Rose

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ravens Academy

Following my visit with Katherine Douglas, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 22 and 23 February 2022, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2019. 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 had 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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, the interim chief executive officer of the Academy Transformation Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Isabel Davis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 February 2022

Context

Following the previous section 8 inspection, there have been a number of staffing changes. New leaders have been appointed to lead mathematics, special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), early years and computing. The vice-principal has been seconded to another school in the trust. Two members of staff have returned from long-term leave. The two teachers in early years are new to the role. An additional part-time teacher and a trained counsellor have also been appointed.

There is no longer a local governing body. The trust board is responsible for the governance of the school.

The number of pupils on roll has fallen from 357 to 349. The Nursery class is full and now operates morning and afternoon sessions.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Trust and school leaders have taken effective action towards the priorities identified for school improvement during the previous two inspections. While this is the case, there are areas where the urgency of actions being taken has not been quick enough.

While leaders have been successful in refining areas of the curriculum for pupils, there is still improvement required. Leaders have started to review and rethink the curriculum to make sure that the content of the curriculum in place ensures that pupils can be successful and achieve well. Some subject areas are more developed than others. Leaders are continuing to work on the training and support for staff to increase the confidence and skills of staff to teach all subjects well.

Leaders have made sure that curriculum leaders have the skills to lead the subjects for which they are responsible. This is beginning to ensure that the quality of education is improving. For example, the content of the mathematics, history and geography curriculums engages pupils and is helping pupils remember what they have learned. When I was talking to pupils, they could recall important knowledge and make connections that will help them learn more. Examples are multiplication facts and details about the recent stormy weather.

Leaders are ensuring that when they think about and review the curriculum, they consider the needs of pupils who are disadvantaged and pupils with SEND. This is helping teachers to consider individual pupil needs and to plan and deliver a curriculum for which pupils understand the new knowledge and skills being taught.

Previously, the identification of pupils with SEND was not accurate. It is now more secure because most pupils have appropriate targets and teachers have had training to ensure that they consider how pupils can achieve these. However, there remains a small number

of pupils who have recently joined the school or have been recently identified with SEND who are not having their needs met yet. Consequently, these pupils are not learning as well as they should.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have again reviewed the phonics programme to teach aspects of the early reading curriculum. While leaders are making progress to improve the reading curriculum in the school, it has been too slow. In part, this is as a result of the pandemic. The current, newly introduced phonics programme has been implemented. All staff have received training; however, there is not enough urgency and precision in knowing where pupils are in their learning so that teachers can quickly identify pupils' starting points and what they need to learn next. The programme in place is not being used well enough. Teachers are not making sure that plans are in place for pupils to catch up or achieve well.

Leaders have ensured that reading for pleasure has a high profile in the school now. Pupils read independently and are also read to by their teachers every day. Pupils enjoy choosing books from the new library. Pupils in key stage 2 can talk with confidence about the books they have read. New systems, such as gaining tokens to use in the book-vending machine, is helping to encourage reading.

A continued focus on the behaviour, safety and welfare of pupils is resulting in a calmer and more productive environment for learning.

Leaders have made sure that safeguarding is at the top of everyone's agenda. Robust procedures are in place and followed. Timely intervention and actions are in place. Pupils know that staff are there to help them with any worries they have. Leaders are proactive in their approach to any racist or sexually harmful behaviour.

Leaders have worked hard to ensure that attendance during the pandemic has been consistent with national figures. However, there is still a large proportion of pupils whose attendance is still not good enough. Leaders have analysed this data and looked in detail at the reasons why. Some improvements have been made and external support has been acted on. This is an area on which leaders are continuing to work.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the range of high-quality training they have received. There are mixed views about workload from staff, but most feel well supported in their roles. The relationship between staff and pupils creates a warm and welcoming environment for everyone to learn in.

The trust board has taken on all responsibility for governance. The two link trustees have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Trustees challenge and support leaders to meet the targets set and are fulfilling their role to address school improvement well. They know that persistent absence is a concern and also that early reading changes are still to be implemented. Leaders and trustees are now better placed to successfully oversee the areas to improve.

Additional support

Support from the executive principal and more recently the primary education director has been instrumental in the progress made so far. The trust support is coordinated by the director of the Academy Transformation Institute and has focused on mathematics, subject leadership and curriculum design. Further expertise now has been commissioned to support the further improvement identified in early reading, for pupils with SEND and to ensure that pupils attend consistently well.

Evidence

We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, the executive principal, the special educational needs coordinator and other senior leaders. We also met with the trust national education director, the primary director, pupils, staff, and other trust representatives responsible for governance. We visited lessons, spent time in the playground and listened to pupils read to staff.