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Caz Brasenell
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Dear Caz Brasenell

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ark Kings Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 13 and 14 December 2022 on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in February 2022.

During the inspection, Ian Hardman, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed, with you and other senior leaders, the regional director, the secondary director of education of the multi-academy trust, and the chair of governors, the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. I also visited lessons, spoke with staff, pupils and parents and carers, viewed pupils' work and scrutinised documents. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Ark Kings Academy remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

Safeguarding is effective.

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

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the previous inspection, you and trust leaders have taken rapid action to strengthen the leadership team, including appointing a new principal and two vice-principals to the secondary phase. This has increased the team's capacity to establish a cycle of 'action, monitor and review' that is beginning to have an impact on achieving positive change.

Almost 60% of staff have changed since the school was last inspected. Trust leaders have been rigorous in ensuring that the school has had a full complement of teaching staff for this academic year. Nonetheless, the scale of turnover has meant that there were significant training needs in a range of areas. Much of this training has been completed, but you are aware of the fine tuning now required. This is particularly in relation to all staff having the knowledge and understanding to adapt the planned curriculum to meet the needs of pupils. Trust leaders have provided support and resources to ensure that this significant improvement is achieved as quickly as possible.

You have constructed a detailed and carefully organised improvement plan that identifies what needs to be addressed, how it should be addressed and by when. You have kept a tight focus on the specific weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, building a coherent approach to achieving fundamental change over time. Trust leaders are monitoring closely the impact of action taken. Oversight is regular, rigorous and appropriate.

You have been resolute in making sure that the safety of pupils is paramount. You have developed and unified expert teams of staff, including pastoral, welfare and behaviour teams, to work alongside the safeguarding team. This has strengthened leaders' ability to identify concerns very rapidly. It has also ensured that help is quickly at hand for pupils and their families. Pupils say that they know whom they can talk to if they have a problem and that they are much more confident of receiving help and support.

You have taken decisive action to institute procedures to check on the safety of pupils attending alternative provision. These are now robust and appropriate. As a result, leaders and staff do not lose sight of these pupils anymore. Half-termly visits to placements, as well as reports of progress, are in place for all 15 pupils. Daily attendance checks are carried out, and long-term attendance issues are monitored and followed up. Pre-placement checks are now rigorous.

You have established much higher expectations of pupils' learning behaviours. You are working hard to make sure that pupils meet these expectations in every lesson. However, you are aware that achieving compliance is only the first step to improving the learning experiences of pupils. In some subjects, such as music, art and food technology, pupils are interested and engaged learners who are proud of their achievements. In other areas, they do not yet have the same opportunities to become independent and critical thinkers.

You have ensured that the special educational needs coordinator now has the capacity and support to identify those pupils who may need additional support more quickly. The

special educational needs and/or disabilities register is accurate and up to date. Each phase in the school has a dedicated team of specialists who can be deployed where and when needed. Teachers have received training to use assessment information more effectively to recognise gaps and misconceptions. This has resulted in improved understanding of the help pupils need. However, many teachers do not yet have the expertise to make the adaptations to the curriculum that some learners need. Conversely, those pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs are now supported well. They learn strategies to manage their behaviours independently, and there is evidence that they make good progress over time in doing so, for instance in making use of short time-out arrangements to reduce stress before returning quickly to lessons.

You have identified that many pupils already in school have previously undiagnosed problems with reading. As a result, you have rightly placed reading at the heart of your improvement agenda. Since September, all pupils have been assessed, and barriers to reading have been identified. You have introduced a suitable reading curriculum, including for pupils in the early stages of reading, and have made sure that staff are trained to deliver this curriculum effectively. In addition, regular reading with pupils has been introduced to the daily form-tutor sessions. You recognise that it is too early to see sustained impact. However, initial indications show that a significant number of identified pupils have made rapid progress and are reading more confidently and fluently.

At the previous inspection, pupils in the secondary phase said that bullying was rife and was not dealt with effectively by staff. They said that they did not feel safe and that they were frequently subjected to derogatory language and homophobic behaviours. During this inspection, the majority of pupils spoken to said that bullying of all types has reduced substantially. They spoke of the workshops and assemblies that have focused on the harm such behaviours do. Most pupils said that they now feel confident to report bullying because they are also confident that leaders will deal with it. They say that this makes them feel much safer in school.

You and other leaders have radically overhauled the systems used by the school to improve pupils' behaviour. You have removed the isolation room and made a very positive shift from a sanctions-based policy to an approach based on rewards and praise. This has been very well received by pupils. Increasingly, and especially in the lower years of the secondary phase, pupils are keen to earn praise and the rewards that are attached to consistently good behaviour. They see the impact of better behaviour on their learning and are beginning to take issue on the occasions when the poor behaviour of others disrupts their learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Ark multi-academy trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
His Majesty's Inspector