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Caz Brasenell
Executive Principal
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Dear Mrs 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 10 and 11 May 2023, 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 second 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, Kate Wilcock, Ofsted Inspector (OI), Nicola Walters, Ofsted Inspector (OI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the regional director, the secondary director of education of the multi-academy trust, trustees and governors the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Inspectors also carried out lesson visits, spoke with parents, pupils and staff, viewed pupils' work and a range of 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.

I am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since my last monitoring visit, you and trust leaders have maintained the focus on tackling the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. The leadership team is now well

established and has demonstrated the capacity to continue the trajectory of improvement. You are carefully monitoring your progress against the action plan, including those areas for improvement that need further work. Support from the trust ensures that school leaders can access additional expertise where needed. However, increasingly, leaders are able to reciprocate, as they develop their own areas of expertise, for instance sharing the groundbreaking work you have been undertaking with the NSPCC to further develop your response to all areas of safeguarding. This includes the development of a safeguarding network across the locality that extends your reach and ability to keep pupils safe.

The main focus of this visit was the quality of education. You have ensured that high expectations for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are set out and fully understood. Staff training is increasingly focused on developing common strategies to support pupils' learning. As a result, the commitment to improve pupils' experience of their education is common across all staff. You know that the next step is to implement and embed the ambitious curriculum intent more consistently in classrooms.

The role of subject leaders has been strengthened. Training and support is helping them to develop the necessary skills to take full responsibility for monitoring the quality of education in their subject. This includes making the important shift from checking what is taught to checking how it is taught and the impact it is having.

At the last visit, you had provided the special educational needs coordinator with additional time and support to identify pupils with SEND. This has paid dividends. There are now effective systems and processes in place to ensure that pupils' SEND can be very well supported. Training for staff in the use of pupil passports and individual learning plans to inform their planning and teaching has taken place. There are early indications that this is beginning to have an impact on classroom routines and teachers' ability to quickly identify where pupils need extra help.

The increased focus on reading, noted at my last visit, is having an impact. You have built on the effective practice in the primary phase to ensure that appropriate support is in place for all early readers regardless of their age. You have ensured that identification of need includes the root cause. Suitable programmes have been introduced so that any teaching intervention is focused, for instance on decoding words, reading fluency or comprehension. Pupils report, and inspectors witnessed, their pride when their reading improves.

The introduction of dedicated reading sessions in key stage 3 is appreciated by pupils. They say that they enjoy the opportunity to read for pleasure. All pupils are encouraged to visit the school library and to take books home. Several told the inspector that they now choose to read at home.

You are aware that there is more to do to help staff increase their confidence to introduce strategies for learning in the classroom as well as maintaining the focus on developing pupils' learning behaviours. Equally, you know that many pupils need support to increase

their confidence and resilience to discuss and share ideas and to develop their use of spoken and written language in ways which support their learning. You recognise that further professional development may be required in some cases.

We discussed the need to raise expectations of how pupils record their learning. Currently, in many subjects, pupils' books do not provide them with a resource for reviewing, retrieving and recapping their learning. This is because, too often, pupils are not required to write in full sentences, or to provide extended responses to questions and concepts. As a result, they cannot connect what is in their books to what they were learning.

We also discussed your ongoing work to improve the use of assessment. Co-planning time for subject leaders has been provided to help them support staff to understand what assessment is measuring and what needs to be shared with pupils. We agreed that this work needs to be accelerated, so that pupils always know how well they are doing in any subject and what they need to do to improve.

At my last visit, you were focusing on establishing high expectations of pupils' behaviour. This is having a positive effect. During this visit, pupils were polite and welcoming. Interactions between staff and pupils were notably more constructive and respectful. Pupils spoke with appreciation of the welfare hub and the new learning hub. Those who had accessed these facilities were very clear about how they had been helped and supported. Although a few pupils remain less positive about their experiences at school, the vast majority recognise a significant improvement in behaviour since the last inspection. Among pupils, there is a growing sense that they feel cared for.

You have taken every opportunity to work with a range of agencies wherever it is in the interests of pupils to do so. Support from the local authority has enabled you to access volunteer services who walk the main routes to and from school with pupils to increase their sense of safety. Links with the youth offending service and the police commissioner's programme 'Precious Lives' are providing valuable additional support for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of 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