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10 July 2023

Julia Christou  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Christou

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of King's Oak Academy**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 6 and 7 June 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 May 2022.

During the inspection, Daniel Short, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you and the CEO, trustees and other leaders of the multi-academy trust 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. We also reviewed the school's rapid action plan, minutes of school improvement board meetings, monitoring reports from the trust and external reviews. We carried out visits to lessons, met with teaching and support staff, met with pupils, reviewed examples of pupils' writing and listened to some pupils read to a familiar adult. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

**King's Oak 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 strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.**

## **The progress made towards the removal of special measures**

There have been recent changes to staffing. The deputy headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) left the school in April. An interim SENCo from within the trust supported the school during the spring term. Since then, a different interim SENCo, also from within the trust, has supported the school and will continue to do so up until the end of the academic year. From September, a permanent SENCo will join the school, who will also be the curriculum leader responsible for reading. You have recently appointed a new leader with responsibility for curriculum design. At the end of this academic year, some teachers are leaving, with some new teachers joining in September.

Since the previous visit, leaders have ensured there is greater consistency in the teaching of reading. Reading books support pupils well because staff ensure they match them to the sounds that pupils know and can read. Pupils enjoy reading, and use the strategies they learn to help them read unfamiliar words. There is, however, still work to do to ensure the reading curriculum effectively supports all pupils to develop their fluency. Staff do not always receive the ongoing support they need to develop their own knowledge and expertise in teaching pupils to read. This means there are inconsistencies in the phonic knowledge of staff. Some staff do not check how well pupils use their phonic knowledge. Pupils do not routinely get opportunities to practise using the sounds they are learning to read accurately and fluently. This means they rely too heavily on sounding out when they see the same word again, and do not read words with the fluency they should. Pupils also struggle to apply their knowledge of phonics into their writing. All of this means there are still a significant number of pupils who are struggling to keep up with the pace of the reading programme. There remains work to be done to ensure all staff have the knowledge they need to teach reading well.

Leaders' creation of a curriculum in the early years remains a work in progress. Curriculum plans identify the activities children will complete. In places, these plans also include some helpful questions that staff could ask children to prompt their learning. Where this is effective, staff narrate children's actions to build language and to guide children to improve their work. Relationships between children and adults are warm and caring, and this helps children to develop their curiosity. However, the curriculum still lacks precision. It does not clearly identify what leaders want children to learn. Therefore, activities are not always well planned, purposeful or effective at helping children learn. This means children often lose focus and do not stick with activities. It also means staff do not embed crucial knowledge, especially around language and mathematics. Leaders appreciate that there is much more work required to identify, with precision, how the early years curriculum will ensure that children learn the crucial knowledge they need to prepare them well for the next stage of their learning.

Leaders have made progress in improving the design of the curriculum. In subjects where leaders have completed this work, there is a curriculum in place that clearly sets out the knowledge pupils will learn. This supports staff to understand what they need to teach pupils. The newly appointed curriculum lead has added increased capacity to bring about

the change needed. Leaders know that finalising their curriculum design for all subjects, including where this curriculum begins in the early years, is something they need to complete.

Since January, you have rightly prioritised improving the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Effective training for staff means they better understand how to identify when a pupil has SEND. 'Pupil passports' are now specific, and support staff to understand what barriers pupils have, the support they require to overcome them and how to measure the success of this support. This has been a significant and important development since the previous visit. There is still work to do to further improve provision for pupils with SEND and to ensure that all staff routinely follow the specific strategies on pupils' support plans.

Leaders have yet to establish consistent expectations of behaviour that all staff understand. Where they have set some expectations, staff do not consistently follow these. There are instances, both in lessons and during transition times, where this leads to overly boisterous behaviour, and pupils straying off task. It can also lead to arguments between pupils. When this happens, staff do not use consistent approaches to manage it. Both classrooms and the school dining room can be overwhelming environments for pupils. This means pupils then struggle to manage their emotions and engage in learning. There has been a reduction in the number of serious incidents of poor behaviour. In these instances, positive relationships, clear expectations and routines for individual pupils have undoubtedly supported this success. However, instances of poor behaviour continue to have a negative impact on pupils' learning.

Attendance still requires attention. The systems to promote good attendance and challenge poor attendance are better understood by staff, pupils and parents. Pupils are better motivated to improve their attendance through the actions leaders have taken. This has had a positive impact on some pupils. However, there remain too many pupils who are absent and persistently absent from school. A number of these pupils have been persistently absent in previous academic years. This has a significantly negative impact on their learning.

Trustees and the school improvement board understand where the school is having the most success and where it needs to prioritise improvement. Trustees challenge the work of the school and the information they receive from leaders. The rapid action plan sets out what leaders have done in many areas of the school. In places, this plan focuses more on a narrative of the actions taken. It can be less focused on the specific impact leaders want to see and how successful they have been. Leaders are aware that this should be more focused. Other schools and staff from within the trust have provided support. This has been especially successful in developing provision for SEND.

External support is ongoing for the teaching of phonics, for SEND and to support teachers with assessment.

Parental engagement has been a priority for you and is something you should feel rightly proud of. Parents are more actively involved in their child's learning, through events such as the very well-attended reading café. Parents enjoy these events, and they help them to better understand how to support their child at home.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Williams  
**His Majesty's Inspector**