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Dear Mrs Brigg

Special measures monitoring inspection of River Dart Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 29 September 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in January 2023.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, including the CEO and director of education of the multi-academy trust, a representative from the local authority and the chair of trustees, 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. I also met with the designated safeguarding lead, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), a range of staff both teaching and non-teaching, spoke to pupils and considered a range of documentation. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to be no longer judged as requiring special measures.

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, there has been significant staffing changes, including at school leadership level. The principal has left. The school is currently being led by an acting principal and the director of education for the trust. A new permanent principal has been appointed and will take up post in January 2024. A new SENCo was appointed in April 2023. New teaching staff have been appointed and key school leadership roles have been redefined in relation to both safeguarding and behaviour.

The school has made a determined start to tackle the areas for improvement as identified at the last inspection. Changes in staffing structures have led to a clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities to enable prioritisation of the areas for improvement. Staff, including those new to post, feel supported by both school leaders and the trust. They feel there is a real teamwork approach. There is a clear determination to ensure that the day-to-day organisation of the school focuses on what needs to improve.

The school has started to invest time in monitoring the development of the curriculum in relation to its coherence, sequencing and structure across a range of subject areas. Work has begun to prioritise pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning so that most pupils are now ready to engage in their learning. Staff new to the school now have clear responsibilities in relation to their curriculum areas. As a result, a shared understanding of what is being taught, and why, is developing. This work is beginning to pay off in some subject areas, particularly in personal, social and health education (PSHE). However, the school is not complacent. They know there is still further work to do to develop all subjects across the curriculum, including the effective use of assessment so that all pupils close any gaps in their learning.

The school is aware that the reading curriculum still requires significant work. Although staff talk about supporting individual pupils with their reading development, there is no defined curriculum that supports older pupils to develop and secure fluency or develop a love of reading. Not all staff understand how to support pupils in becoming confident and fluent readers.

The systems for identifying the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have been reviewed. Individual plans for pupils with SEND are now in place. They focus on targeting the relevant identified needs and are supporting teacher understanding of how learning can be adapted. Teacher confidence is growing. Relevant training and development is being prioritised. A range of information is being used to target what support is appropriate. However, the impact of this work is yet to be evaluated.

The school has made improvements to the curriculum to support pupils' personal development, including their understanding of their role in modern Britain, respect and difference. The school has constructed a PSHE curriculum so that there is a greater emphasis on how pupils' understanding of the key knowledge within the PSHE curriculum

is linked and flows through other subject areas. A careers programme has been developed across key stages 3 and 4, so that pupils gain an understanding of their journey beyond school. However, this remains in the early stages of implementation.

The school has overhauled behaviour systems, policy and processes. New procedures in supporting pupils' behaviour have started to have a positive impact. Careful tracking is enabling the school to pinpoint any patterns in behaviour. Clearer expectations of what is acceptable and not acceptable are understood by the school community, including pupils. Staff can talk about what key triggers pupils may demonstrate when behaviour is likely to deteriorate. Pupils say behaviour has improved. Suspensions have reduced; however, there is still work to do to keep suspensions down.

Those responsible for governance have been proactive in building capacity and expertise within the school. The trust has reviewed their processes and procedures to ensure they have the capacity at trustee level to support rapid school improvement. Careful decisions have been taken to ensure consistency at strategic leadership level by the trust's central team as staffing capacity grows. A single governance board has been designed to monitor the areas for improvements moving forward. However, this is not yet been fully implemented.

The school has responded quickly to ensure safeguarding processes and procedures are in place to ensure all pupils are safe. Concerns, however small, are reported through appropriate systems. This reporting is detailed and actions taken are relevant. Regular quality assurance is enabling more effective communication with outside agencies so that pupils get the help they need in a timely way. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities.

The trust works closely with a range of external partners, including the local authority. They receive challenge and support on actions to improve the school. The trust are aware that challenges remain, particularly as more pupils join the school and new initiatives embed. The members of the trust know they need to be systematic in their approach to the monitoring of actions so far to maximise the impact on current pupils as well as preparing for new pupils transitioning to the school in the future.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Barraclough
His Majesty's Inspector