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Andrew Hatherley
Headteacher (Interim)
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Dear Mr Hatherley

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Ashwood Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 28 November 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 September 2022.

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, the interim CEO and other representatives of the multi-academy trust, the chair of governors and a representative of Hampshire local authority 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 visited lessons, spoke to a number of pupils and staff and observed pupils' behaviour. I scrutinised school documents, including safeguarding records, and considered the responses to the staff survey and parent survey. 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 last monitoring inspection, there have been some changes to leadership at the school. You have recently joined as interim headteacher. The school is also receiving leadership support from a different trust while it undergoes the re-brokering process. Despite these changes, staff have undertaken a considerable amount of work to increase the academic ambition of the school. However, the school is realistic that it will take time for the impact of this work to be fully evident. For this reason, the purpose of this monitoring inspection was to look specifically at leaders' work on curriculum and the provision for reading support across the school. I also considered what work leaders had undertaken to continue to improve the attendance and behaviour of pupils.

The school has widened the range of subjects and qualifications that pupils will learn. Pupils now study geography and history as part of the curriculum offer. The school continues to review each of the subject areas in the curriculum. In an increasing number of subjects, the curriculum now identifies the broader concepts that pupils need to learn. Knowledge is now ordered in a logical way. Further work is now needed to ensure teachers break these topics down into smaller ideas to help pupils connect their learning. The school continues to use the expertise of specialist subject advisors and the school improvement partner to check that the curriculum is appropriately designed.

You outlined that the school does not yet have staff with the appropriate subject knowledge and expertise in subjects such as mathematics. This means the mathematics curriculum is still not designed in a way that supports pupils to learn well. The school recognises that this is a significant issue that requires urgent action. In response, a new leader of mathematics will join the school in the new year. The school has continued to develop learning expectations through the 'Ashwood Lesson'. Teaching strategies to help pupils remember and apply new vocabulary are now used with increasing consistency. However, a lack of teacher experience and expertise means that there is variability in learning effectiveness. While there is evidence of effective learning taking place in some lessons, this is not the case in all. Some teachers are not breaking down larger ideas sufficiently to help pupils understand new concepts. Explanations and planned activities do not carefully build on pupils' prior learning. This prevents pupils from following the intended curriculum and making sufficient progress.

The school has strengthened its focus on supporting pupils to read. Pupils now read regularly in their tutor groups. Pupils report that they enjoy the range of interesting books that leaders have selected for them to read. Each week, pupils spend time in lessons analysing recent news articles or publications relevant to their learning. It is clear through looking at pupils' work that this is increasingly more consistent and that most pupils are engaging with this approach. There are imminent plans to open a school library space to provide more opportunities for pupils to access and borrow books. Leaders know that there is still work to do to support those pupils who are not fluent or confident readers.

There is not yet a systematic approach to helping to address gaps in reading knowledge. This means that these pupils are not yet getting the specific help they need.

The expectations around school attendance have risen. This means that an increasing number of pupils are coming to school regularly. Clearer systems of managing attendance mean staff are intervening more quickly when pupils do not come to school. The school has also increased its pastoral capacity by recruiting another 'Advocate' to oversee the care of pupils. Pastoral staff have had additional mental health training. Every pupil now has access to therapeutic support or mentoring with the aim of helping pupils engage more positively in education. The clear behaviour policy is facilitating staff to have a more consistent approach when managing pupils' behaviour. Pupils recognise that expectations of them have increased. However, there are still too many lessons disrupted by pupils refusing to comply with teachers' expectations. Some staff require additional support to help them to establish a respectful and positive relationship with pupils.

The support from Catch22 multi-academy trust is reducing as the school prepares to join another trust. However, the school is engaging well with support from another local trust and the local authority. Governors continue to challenge leaders to make sure the school continues on its trajectory of improvement. In your interim role as headteacher, you are working alongside other leaders in partnership with the local authority to help other schools understand the purpose and ambition of the school. You have already started to develop programmes of support to facilitate a smoother transition when pupils go back into mainstream or specialist settings.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the interim CEO of the Catch22 multi-academy trust, the chair of the local governing board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Payne
His Majesty's Inspector