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Jo Hill
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Hill

Special measures monitoring visit of Olive AP Academy - Thurrock

Following my visit with Janet Tomkins, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 10 and 11 October 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm my findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring visit since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2017.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the trust board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Thurrock. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2017

- Take urgent action to ensure that the school's child protection and safeguarding arrangements are effective by:
 - maintaining written records and supporting evidence that identify the actions taken to protect pupils
 - routinely checking safeguarding records to ensure that systems and procedures are effective in keeping pupils safe
 - undertaking routine checks on the quality and safety of site provision
 - ensuring that all essential site maintenance is undertaken quickly and effectively
 - referring all children who are missing from education to the local authority, within the statutory time frame
 - ensuring that risk assessments for educational trips and visits adequately assess the potential hazards of activities for staff and pupils, giving clear guidance about how to minimise these risks.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - refining and clarifying the roles of all leaders in the school, including those in the local governing body
 - ensuring that there is effective leadership of provision for children looked after, literacy, the use of pupil premium, safeguarding arrangements, site safety and maintenance, and attendance
 - clarifying the purpose of the school with all stakeholders, including the local authority and local schools, so that there are shared expectations about admission and reintegration back into mainstream provision
 - continuing to work with the local authority on the backlog of pupils who require a long-overdue decision about their application for an education, health and care plan, and subsequent appropriate provision
 - ensuring that trust personnel, most notably at executive headteacher level, continue to support the new leadership team to embed their work and bring stability to the school
 - embedding the actions taken so far to monitor the quality of provision for the pupils in home tuition
 - continuing development of the curriculum to ensure that pupils receive a tailored pathway that suits their specific needs, and that the quality of this provision is monitored effectively.

- Improve attendance and behaviour by:
 - developing new systems to urgently increase the attendance of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, and those who attend alternative provision
 - rapidly increasing the provision for the social, emotional and mental health needs of pupils, as well as complex learning needs, so that they can develop better relationships and interact more effectively and, as a result, make better progress
 - embedding the new behaviour systems and closely scrutinising leaders' analysis of the effectiveness of the systems, so that interventions to support pupils to rectify their behaviour are timely and effective.
- Raise the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by:
 - developing the new assessment system so that it can be used more effectively by teachers and leaders to ensure pupils make better progress
 - urgently addressing the poor-quality indoor and outdoor provision of the primary site, so that it successfully provides the nurturing, tactile learning environment that meets the complex learning and mental health needs of pupils
 - continuing to develop the new approaches to improving the quality of teaching
 - sharing the examples of good practice in the school with all teachers.

It is recommended that the school does not appoint newly qualified teachers without the agreement of one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

An external review of the use of the additional funding received for disadvantaged pupils (pupil premium) should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring visit carried out on 10 to 11 October 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, a group of staff, including teaching and support staff, and two groups of pupils. They also met with the chief executive of the trust, the director of school effectiveness and standards, the chair of the interim progress board, an Olive Academy Multi-Academy Trust board trustee, the trust associate for data strategy, the head of inclusion services and the head of school improvement from the local authority. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with an interim progress board member.

Inspectors visited 10 lessons jointly with leaders, across different subjects and year groups. During these visits, inspectors spoke with pupils and looked at their work to evaluate the quality of learning. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour between lessons, at breaktimes and at lunchtimes, holding informal discussions with a range of pupils and staff.

Inspectors assessed the impact of the leaders' actions taken since the last inspection. This focused on the areas for improvement to the school's child protection and safeguarding arrangements, leadership and management, attendance and behaviour, and the quality of teaching. Pupils' outcomes were not a key focus of this inspection and will feature in the next visit, when the impact of changes made to teaching is more demonstrable.

Context

Since the last inspection, the previous headteacher has left the school and been replaced by an interim headteacher from the trust's school improvement team. An executive headteacher added capacity by working across the Thurrock and Havering schools during this interim period. The school has been through a period of turbulence with staffing. The co-executive headteacher became the substantive headteacher in June 2017. The executive headteacher is now the director of school effectiveness and standards. A new special educational needs coordinator has been appointed. Three new middle leadership posts have been created, along with a facilities manager, a finance manager and a data manager. The school is in the process of recruiting a deputy headteacher.

The trust has reorganised its central school improvement team functions, which include appointing a safeguarding, personal development, behaviour and welfare, and attendance lead, who is now working at the school on a weekly basis.

The trust board replaced the local governing body with an interim progress board in March 2017, to monitor school improvement.

In the light of the previous inspection, the trust took the decision to close the primary provision as the premises were unfit for purpose. The secondary provision moved premises in June 2017 to a newly built school. It provides short-term education and support to pupils who are vulnerable to exclusion or who have been permanently excluded from their mainstream schools, as well as to pupils with medical conditions.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You, your senior leadership team, the trust and the interim progress board have taken significant steps to address the issues identified in the previous inspection report. You have high aspirations for the pupils. A number of staff are new to their roles but demonstrate true commitment. All of your staff understand the actions needed to improve the school and the impact they must have to support its removal from special measures.

The trust's statement of action is closely linked to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. There are short clear statements of the actions to be taken, presented in a logical sequence. The detailed plan has timescales that indicate the need for rapid improvement. You are using clear systems to monitor the progress you are making and evaluating the impact. Some initiatives have been introduced recently, and it is not yet possible to evaluate the impact of these. You also state how parents and carers will be kept informed of the actions being taken and the effectiveness of these actions.

Leaders have taken prompt and effective action to improve safeguarding and ensure that pupils are kept safe at all times. In response to the previous inspection, the trust sought an external evaluation of safeguarding and acted immediately on the areas identified as concerns. The interim headteacher had a background in safeguarding, which enabled the school to make significant improvements in this crucial area. Policies and procedures have now been strengthened. The single central record of pre-employment checks meets requirements. Leaders have quickly implemented more rigorous systems for recording vital information about how to keep pupils safe.

You ensure that staff receive safeguarding training on the latest statutory guidance. They also receive training that is tailored to the individual needs of pupils in the school. Staff spoken to during the inspection showed a good understanding of the possible indicators of abuse, as well as how to deal with and respond to disclosures from pupils.

You have acted swiftly to ensure that risk assessments for educational visits adequately assess the potential hazards of activities for staff and pupils. They also give clear guidance about how to minimise these risks. However, the summary of visits and evaluations is not always complete and needs further scrutiny. The school

is presently working on embedding the new risk assessment and safeguarding recording systems to ensure the utmost level of consistency.

Leaders are now referring any children who are missing from education to the local authority within the statutory time frame. Leaders are steadfast in their belief that the safeguarding of pupils is paramount.

Staff on the school's reception are well aware of security issues when allowing visitors into the building. The grounds are now secure. One pupil stated, 'We feel a lot safer having the electronic gates.' The new site manager maintains meticulous records of the routine checks on the quality and safety of site provision. All site maintenance is undertaken quickly and effectively. A culture of vigilance is now evident in the school's work.

The purpose of the school has been clarified since the previous inspection. The chief executive of the trust and the interim headteacher met with each secondary headteacher from local schools individually to ensure agreement. The vision has been agreed with all stakeholders, including the local authority, about admission and reintegration back into mainstream provision.

You have rightly placed a high priority on improving transition arrangements. This aims to begin to ensure that pupils with specific needs are allocated permanent school places which are well suited to their requirements more quickly. In the past, some pupils requiring special school provision stayed longer than was necessary. Some pupils continue to attend for overly extended periods until a more suitable placement becomes available.

The choice of subjects that pupils study is in the early stages of being adapted to better meet their specific needs and aspirations. There is a high priority on supporting teachers to improve but you have also ensured that the staff who do not exhibit the required capacity are challenged.

You have worked hard to significantly reduce the number of pupils receiving home tuition. The overwhelming majority of pupils are now attending school. You have managed the recent arrival of these new pupils into school well and have rightfully prioritised building their self-esteem and resilience in order to fully access the curriculum.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium was scheduled for June 2017. Due to the relocation of the school premises, this was postponed. You realise the urgency of having a pupil premium review and have rescheduled it for later this term.

Trust leaders and the interim progress board are providing senior leaders with rigorous support and challenge. They have rightly concentrated their efforts on strengthening the school's leadership and safeguarding procedures. The interim

progress board meets regularly and receives reports from the headteacher and updates on the progress of the school's improvement plan.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

In the short space of time since your appointment, you have rightly prioritised the move to your new site, the staffing restructuring and safeguarding. You have had less impact on gaining greater consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The quality of teaching varies extensively. Pupils' progress is not rapid enough to enable them to catch up and reach the expected standard.

Some improvements in teaching and learning are evident, not least in that there is a calm atmosphere of perseverance in classes. Pupils and teachers have positive relationships and the majority of pupils respond swiftly to teachers' directions. Teachers encourage pupils to have more positive learning behaviours, reminding pupils regularly about the need for resilience. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. One pupil stated, 'We are able to learn more. The lessons are a lot calmer.' Another stated, 'We can get more work done now'.

Leaders have a secure understanding of what needs to be done to improve teaching further. This is reflected in the professional development staff receive. Leaders rightfully acknowledge that pupils presently receive the same work, regardless of their ability. Questioning does not always challenge pupils to deepen their knowledge. Pupils are not adequately supported to develop their literacy and writing skills. Pupils act on the guidance they receive to improve their work. However, teachers' feedback has a variable impact on helping pupils to make the strong progress needed.

You have quickly established new and suitable systems for evaluating the quality of teaching. A programme of lesson observations and learning walks is combined with regular scrutiny of pupils' work. Revised plans to rapidly improve teaching have been implemented this term and are being checked to improve progress. A comprehensive training programme is now in place to ensure greater consistency in teaching. Staff are now completing moderation work with mainstream colleagues and this is helping them to improve their practice.

A new and improved system of assessing pupils' attainment on entry, and setting minimum and aspirational targets has been introduced. Notably, the target-setting process takes account of pupils' key stage 2 attainment, where this is available. As pupils have usually had serious disruption to their education before joining the school, this method invariably leads to more aspirational targets, hence the inclusion of minimum targets.

Teachers are not yet using assessment information accurately to ensure that work is well matched to pupils' abilities. Consequently, the work is often too easy. You realise that every individual and every lesson matters. The new data tracking

system means that teachers need to have an increased understanding of how well pupils are learning and the progress they make.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils often arrive at the school with a record of poor behaviour. During this visit, pupils' behaviour was calm and purposeful. Pupils conducted themselves with self-discipline and related well to one another, staff and visitors. Pupils wear their uniforms with pride and show the utmost respect for their environment. There was no evidence of litter or graffiti in classrooms or around the school.

Pupils and staff agree that the decision to ban mobile phones around the school has had a positive impact on pupils' behaviour in lessons. The vast majority of pupils showed good attitudes to learning in lessons.

Pupils speak confidently about the changes that have been introduced to improve the provision. Pupils say that they feel safe and that they are now happier attending school. They appreciate the opportunity to participate in lunchtime activities such as football and table tennis. Pupils feel cared for. One pupil stated, 'They have given us the opportunities to understand our next steps in life.'

Attendance is still significantly below average. It remains a barrier to pupils' learning. Pupils' attendance is slowly improving from a very low level. Much is done to help pupils overcome the anxieties that have led to long periods of absence. You are working more closely with families to improve attendance. Attendance is monitored well and non-attendance is now followed up thoroughly to encourage pupils to participate in full-time education. There have been no permanent exclusions since September 2016. Fixed-term exclusions have also reduced in number.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes remain too low. This is because teaching has been ineffective in the past. While current teaching is starting to improve, teachers do not have a clear enough picture of what each child knows and what needs to be learned next.

Pupils' work confirms that they do not make the rapid progress needed to catch up on previous gaps in their learning. Too few opportunities are provided to develop pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum.

You now have accurate assessment information about the starting points for current pupils. Assessment information is analysed thoroughly to provide a range of information about the progress of each pupil.

External support

The trust provides strong support for the school. Members of the trust visit frequently and evaluate the progress being made. You are wisely drawing on the support of external consultants to make improvements in the school. An external review of safeguarding was completed in January 2017. A further external review took place in March 2017 to assess the school's improvements since January. It was accompanied by the trust's own evaluation of safeguarding. This has provided useful feedback that has shaped the school's improvement plans. An external review of the pupil premium is scheduled for November 2017.

The headteacher works closely with the secondary headteachers that make use of the service. She attends meetings of headteachers within the local authority to ensure that the profile of the school is high and to ensure that the provision matches the needs of other schools well.