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7 January 2022

Annabelle Thomas
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Thomas

Special measures monitoring inspection of Unified Academy

Following my visit with Hilary Macdonald, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) to your school on 24 November 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Having considered the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Orchard Hill College Academy

Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Surrey.
This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 24 November 2021

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in March 2020, the school moved to a newly refurbished, permanent school site. The school has changed its name from Chart Wood School to Unified Academy.

There have been numerous changes to staffing since March 2020, including several teachers and teaching assistants leaving the school. Currently, most teaching staff hold substantive posts. Several teaching assistant posts are filled by agency staff.

The senior leadership team members, with the exception of the executive principal, are all new. The previous principal left the school in March 2020. A temporary acting principal was in post from April 2020 until March 2021. The substantive principal joined the school in April 2021. The previous deputy principal, designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and special educational needs coordinator have left the school. The deputy principal, who is also the new DSL, joined the school in a temporary position in November 2020 and took up her substantive post in July 2021. An assistant principal with responsibility for the pastoral aspects of the school joined the school in September 2020 and an assistant principal with responsibility for the curriculum took up her post in September 2021.

There have also been changes to the membership of the local governing body, including a new chair, who joined in January 2021.

At the time of this monitoring inspection, approximately a fifth of staff and a tenth of pupils were self-isolating for a short period of time due to COVID-19. Leaders were operating a rolling programme of remote education, with a different year group learning from home every two days. This is a short-term measure until staff are able to return to school.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

The new senior leadership team is taking effective action to improve the school. Leaders have ensured that the vast majority of staff are on board with the changes being made to the school. During the inspection, senior leaders, governors and representatives of the trust were able to articulate clearly their vision for the school. They reflected honestly on what has been achieved so far and what is still to be accomplished. Leaders demonstrated that there are now comprehensive systems in place to enable better monitoring and to hold leaders and staff to account for their work. However, some of these systems are in their early stages of use. Importantly, staff have confidence in the school's new leaders. There is a sense that everyone is pulling together to ensure a better future of the pupils in the school.

Leaders have ensured that arrangements for safeguarding are now effective. A new safeguarding team, led by an experienced DSL, ensures that safeguarding pupils is

everybody's top priority. All staff, including new and temporary staff, receive the information and training they need to understand the school's context and to implement the school's safeguarding procedures. Leaders check staff knowledge about safeguarding more regularly than in the past. They monitor closely that staff notice and record safeguarding concerns. However, records relating to staff training in behaviour and safety are stored in different places, which limits leaders' ability to quickly know when training needs to be updated.

There is now one system for staff to use to record concerns about pupils' behaviour, safety and well-being. This is easier for staff to use than previous systems and enables leaders to identify new or growing concerns about a pupil. Leaders now record follow-up actions and interactions with pupils, their families and external professionals routinely. They were able to demonstrate that they work effectively together and with outside agencies to secure help for pupils who need it.

Recruitment checks on new staff, including agency staff, are secure. However, during the inspection it became clear that a recent change in format to the single central record had led to some confusion over how it should be stored. This was addressed during the inspection.

Issues with the safety of the site were identified in March 2021, when Ofsted carried out an additional monitoring inspection while routine inspections were temporarily suspended due to COVID-19. These included damaged electrical sockets and missing fire extinguishers. Leaders have implemented a new site action plan to improve site safety. Previous damage has been repaired and protective measures established to help prevent future damage to the site. Furthermore, leaders ensure that staff have the opportunity to raise concerns about site safety at daily briefing sessions. Any issues that arise are dealt with quickly. For example, graffiti was quickly removed from the walls during the inspection.

Leaders' safeguarding work is monitored by the local governing body and a representative from the trust. This support has contributed strongly to the rapid improvements to safeguarding practice in the school.

Representatives of the trust describe the school's improvement journey as including too many 'false starts' due to changes in staffing and the challenges presented by the pandemic. Plans for improvement have been slower to implement than the trust intended. These include planned improvements to the curriculum and to pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Leaders continue to promote a more nurturing, therapeutic approach to managing behaviour. Training in this approach is ongoing. Much has had to be repeated because of the significant staff turnover in the last year. During the visit, pupils were seen to display highly challenging behaviour, including frequent swearing and the ignoring of requests made by staff. Leaders' ambition is to provide more therapies in school to support pupils'

behaviour by comprehensively addressing their social, emotional and mental health needs.

There are signs that the leaders' approach is starting to work. There has been a significant reduction in the use of restraint. The use of fixed-term exclusion has reduced substantially. Suggested simple scripts for use by adults when responding to challenge from pupils offer very practical help to staff and ensure challenging behaviour is responded to increasingly systematically. Records about pupils' behaviour are more reliably recorded, which allows leaders to identify and address any trends or patterns. For example, there is a better understanding of which parts of the school day cause pupils most anxiety and preventative measures are introduced to help remove this anxiety.

A more systematic approach to monitoring pupils' attendance is in place. Leaders now know where every pupil is every day. All absences are followed up quickly and rigorously. The family support worker conducts home visits, including with social workers, to engage with families and help address the barriers to good attendance. Leaders value the support from the local authority inclusion lead, who actively monitors attendance and engages with families to encourage pupils' attendance. However, these strengthened measures are in their infancy. Although some pupils' attendance has improved, overall attendance is far too low. There are several pupils on roll who rarely or never attend.

Last year, too few pupils achieved useful qualifications before leaving the school. Several have been unable to sustain attendance at college or in work since leaving the school. Leaders, rightly, continue to support these pupils to help find appropriate next stages of education, employment or training. Leaders are determined that this situation does not happen again. Furthermore, they acknowledge that pupils are not currently well enough prepared to cope in the wider world.

A number of measures are being implemented to improve the quality of education in the school. The curriculum has been reviewed. Lessons such as 'well-being' aim to help pupils to understand the key things they can do to maintain good mental and physical health. More practical activities, such as making products in design and technology, have been reintroduced after some reduction due to previous restrictions linked to the pandemic. The introduction of qualifications in a wider range of subjects conveys a sense of leaders' ambition that is starting to help pupils have more confidence in their ability to achieve. Staff appreciate the more streamlined approach to planning what knowledge pupils need to learn in each subject. A more structured approach to assessment means that there is a better understanding of what pupils know and can do. Leaders have also ensured that more teaching staff are qualified, or are training to become qualified, as teachers. Pupil profiles have also been amended to provide adults with more useful information about the best approaches to help pupils to learn. A system for monitoring the quality of the curriculum has now been introduced.

However, much of this work is just beginning. More training for staff is required to ensure that the curriculum is well sequenced and fully in place. There remains a need for more pupils to be engaged in their learning and know more by the time they leave the school.

Pleasingly, staff appear increasingly keen and eager to make the necessary improvements to the curriculum and to teaching in order for all this to be achieved.

Importantly, leaders are not as far ahead as they should be in prioritising reading in the curriculum. There is not enough focus on reading in the school's improvement planning. Consequently, leaders are still in the early stages of deciding how to structure the curriculum for reading. Decisions have yet to be made about which resources to use to teach pupils who struggle how to learn to decode words quickly and read fluently. There is not a common approach to teaching reading across all subjects and staff are not adequately trained. In addition, while there is a general ambition to develop a love of reading, and some new books have been chosen to appeal to boys' interests, leaders acknowledge that there is not enough notable impact at this point.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders must urgently develop and implement a systematic, whole-school approach to teaching pupils to read. This includes training staff so that they are better equipped to support pupils to read more accurately and fluently.

Additional support

The trust continues to provide the school with extensive support, including financially. The deputy chief executive officer meets with school leaders weekly to check that the school continues to improve. Health and safety officers from the trust are supporting school staff to ensure that site safety is maintained. The trust's safeguarding lead attends weekly meetings with the school's safeguarding team. This provides a helpful 'fresh pair of eyes' to leaders as they make decisions on how best to safeguard pupils.

Leaders may wish to draw on expertise from within the wider trust to support improvements in the curriculum for reading.

Leaders from the school and the trust find the meetings they have with the local authority and regional schools commissioner about further ongoing improvement to the school useful. This includes discussions about the best way to ensure more therapists are available to support the school. Support from the local authority inclusion team and attendance officers is also valued by the school.

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, other senior leaders, a group of governors, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, deputy chief executive officer, some administrative staff and some subject leaders. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils as they toured the school.