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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Valerie Rose
Principal
Ravens Academy
Nayland Drive
Clacton-on-Sea
Essex
CO16 8TZ

Dear Mrs Rose

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ravens Academy

Following my visit with David Milligan and Isabel Davis, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), to your school on 11 and 12 May 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 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 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the 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 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 the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified 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 (CEO) of the Academy Transformation Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 May 2021

Context

Following the previous section 5 inspection, an executive principal was appointed to lead the school. A new principal was appointed in September 2020. A coordinator of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has also been appointed. New leaders are in place in the early years and key stage 1. Two new teachers have joined the school. The governing body is led by a new chair and vice chair. The number on roll has fallen from 406 to 357 pupils.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Trust leaders have taken prompt action to improve the school. Suitable plans for improvement are in place. The executive principal and principal have led improvements against a backdrop of staffing changes. There has been significant disruption to pupils' education caused by the pandemic. During this period, pupils' behaviour and attitudes have remained good. Staff have gone out of their way to promote pupils' safety and welfare. They have kept in touch with pupils and their families. Staff training has taken place to update their knowledge of safeguarding pupils and the actions they need to take to keep them safe.

Leaders have established a vision and aims for the school's curriculum aligned to the trust's view of what should be taught. A range of new resources has been introduced. This enables teachers to plan learning and assess pupils' progress in English, mathematics, and the wider curriculum. The overall curriculum intent is much clearer. However, a combination of newly introduced resources, staffing changes, and frequent disruption caused by the pandemic has slowed its implementation. This remains at an early stage of development.

Progress has been made in implementing new planning in mathematics. Detailed plans are in place to teach the subject throughout the school. Teachers are gaining in confidence in teaching mathematics. Not all staff use the resources well enough so that learning builds on what pupils have already learned. Learning is not always adapted to meet the needs of the most able pupils, those with SEND, or for those with gaps in their learning.

Less progress has been made in improving English. This year, leaders reintroduced resources used previously to plan lessons in reading and writing, and to promote links with learning in the wider curriculum. Discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their books confirmed that this approach is new and is not firmly in place. When asked, pupils could describe the theme they were studying using basic vocabulary, but were unable to explain what aspect of the English curriculum they were learning about. They were unsure about what prior learning had taken place linked to their current work. Learning is not organised in order or taught in sufficient depth. Senior

leaders do not have enough monitoring information to show that this approach is working well enough.

Leaders have adopted a theme-based approach to teaching the wider curriculum. Good-quality resources have been introduced to inform teacher's planning. There are early signs of improvement. Pupils are studying topics which stimulate their interest. This aims to enable pupils to develop their reading, spelling, grammar and comprehension skills. However, subject leadership is inconsistent. Only a few leaders of foundation subjects have determined what skills and knowledge should be taught progressively, in each year. Leaders do not routinely monitor how effectively learning in their subject is planned and taught. They are unaware of the impact this new approach is having on the outcomes achieved by pupils in their subjects.

Effective action has been taken to improve the teaching of early reading. There is a more consistent approach to the teaching of phonics in the early years and key stage 1. Staff know which pupils in Year 3 need additional support to help them catch up. Recent assessments have informed staff where the gaps in pupils' learning lie. However, at this stage, a large proportion of pupils still struggle to segment and blend sounds or read fluently. Progress made in learning letters and sounds does not transfer into pupils' early writing skills. Currently, there is a large proportion of pupils who are well behind where they should be at this stage. Not all staff have had enough training to help pupils learn to read.

Reading does not have a high enough profile in the school. Staff ensure that in key stage 1, early readers have suitable books matched to their phonic understanding. Their reading records show they read regularly to an adult at home. This is not built upon in key stage 2. Although there are excellent displays of books around the school and a well-stocked library, not enough pupils read often enough for pleasure.

Recent changes in leadership have improved the identification of and provision for pupils with SEND. There is much more ambition for these pupils. Personalised plans are in place to help teachers modify learning for pupils. Currently, not all pupils with SEND have suitable targets set for them. These arrangements are new and have not been evaluated fully to check that they enable all pupils with SEND to learn as well as they should do.

The majority of pupils in school are disadvantaged. Leaders do not identify these pupils as a distinct group. Most teachers are unaware of which pupils in their classes are disadvantaged, so there are very few strategies in place to support them. The school has substantial pupil premium funding allocated to support the learning and welfare of these pupils. It is not targeted well enough. Leaders, trustees, and governors do not systematically monitor how effectively this funding is spent. They are unaware of the impact it is having on raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders have worked hard to return all pupils to school and get them back into learning. Attendance has risen but, overall, it remains low. Inspectors agree with the trust's view that currently, 'it's not good enough'. Expert help has been brought in to forge links with the parents of pupils who are persistently absent from school.

Additional support

Trust leaders' monitoring of actions to secure improvements slowed during the three national lockdowns. They acknowledge the urgent need to resume their monitoring to accelerate the school's rate of improvement. Systematic checking and reporting on the impact of new curriculum planning and its implementation across all subjects are essential to ensure the school's removal of special measures in the given timescale. Leaders at all levels, a dedicated trustee, and one of the trust's regional improvement leads are ideally placed to oversee this task.

An effective partnership with one of the trust's other schools is enabling staff to develop new resources to teach reading and writing. The local authority is mentoring the new coordinator of SEND. An external consultant has supported senior leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school's work.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior and middle leaders, the designated safeguarding lead, teachers and support staff, and several groups of pupils, including the school council. They held an online meeting with a trustee of the Academy Transformation Trust and a second online meeting with its CEO. They visited lessons and listened to pupils read aloud to staff.