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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Jim Nixon
Interim Headteacher
Ormiston Denes Academy
Yarmouth Road
Lowestoft
Suffolk
NR32 4AH

Dear Mr Nixon

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Ormiston Denes Academy

Following my visit with Al Mistrano, Maureen Su and Fiona Webb, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to your school on 22 and 23 June 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 to improve the school since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in June 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 the 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Ormiston Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Damian Loneragan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 22 June 2021 to 23 June 2021

Context

This was the second monitoring inspection since the school's section 5 inspection in June 2019. The school's first monitoring inspection occurred in December 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the spring term 2021, an additional monitoring visit took place. Inspectors found that the school was taking effective action to provide education in the circumstances.

You were appointed as the interim headteacher from September 2019. Additional new leaders joined the school, including a vice principal and a temporary assistant principal. Later, with support from the trust, the leadership team was restructured. New roles were created, including a vice principal and several heads of year.

A new headteacher has been appointed and will join the school from September 2021. Members of the trust are managing the transition in leadership with the support of an executive principal.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the previous monitoring inspection, leaders have continued their drive to make the school better for pupils. Their plans identify accurately what needs to be done. Leaders are determined and know where there is more work to do in order to remove the school's serious weakness designation.

As a result of leaders' actions, many curriculum plans have improved. Where plans are clear, they support teachers to introduce new knowledge step-by-step. The plans are new, and teachers are now learning how best to use them. As a result, not all learning activities are helpful in supporting pupils learn new things or remember what they have been taught. Pupils told us that they wished they could spend more time on really understanding an idea. While there are 'green shoots' of improvement, inconsistencies in the curriculum still remain. Leaders have identified clearly where this is happening. With the support of the trust, leaders are now providing teachers with relevant training to help improve the curriculum further.

Leaders have prioritised the improvement of the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. Pupils now have more PSHE lessons. There is a stronger focus on providing useful careers' guidance. The PSHE curriculum is planned well and focusses on pupils' needs. Teachers support pupils to make well-considered decisions about their next steps. Pupils told inspectors that they really valued PSHE lessons and it made them aware of issues that affect them.

The previous inspection in spring 2021 highlighted concerns around the provision for pupils who find reading difficult. As a result of leaders' actions, weaker readers now access improved support, including phonics lessons, to help them get better at reading. While some pupils are making effective progress others still need further support to catch up quickly. Leaders plans show that improving literacy and oracy remain a priority for the school.

Leaders are improving the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have a clear understanding of the emotional and behaviour needs of pupils with SEND. The special educational needs coordinator has now rightly focused on improving the support pupils with SEND are getting in the classroom. Leaders recognised that some pupils with SEND are not always getting the help they need to access the school's curriculum. Teachers' adaptations are not always useful in helping pupils with SEND. Work to improve this area is at an early stage and not embedded consistently across all subjects.

A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. While leaders keep a close eye on the safety and welfare of these pupils, they do not check pupils' learning of the curriculum well enough. Leaders do not always have the right strategies to integrate pupils back into the main school curriculum. Governors and the trust have rightly challenged leaders about this issue. Leaders need to ensure these pupils access an effective curriculum more suited to their needs.

Leader's actions continue to improve pupils' behaviour and welfare. Leaders and staff have a better understanding of the emotional support pupils need. Provision such as 'Thrive' are giving leaders a range of tools to keep pupils in school. The number of exclusions and negative behaviour incidents continue to reduce. Pupils, staff and parents told inspectors that behaviour in the school is improving. Inspectors saw courteous behaviour both in and out of the classroom. Against the background of the pandemic, leaders continue their work to improve attendance. Governors have a clear understanding of patterns in attendance and have oversight of the numbers and reasons why pupils are leaving the school.

Staff recognise that their workload can be high. They say that leaders help them prioritise their work effectively. Staff told inspectors that they felt they were part of a community that is beginning to make a real difference to pupils' lives.

Leaders, governors and the trust work closely together to improve the school. The governing body has a strong understanding of the journey the school is on and hold leaders to account for their actions.

Additional support

The trust provides leaders with appropriate challenge. The trust is supporting the school to access the expertise it needs to develop the curriculum and leaders' skills further. Most recently, for example a national leader of SEND has begun to support

the development of the school's special educational needs coordinator. Additionally, the trust has provided the school with an executive principal to strengthen the school's leadership.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance and representatives of the Ormiston Academies Trust.