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Dear Mrs Baddeley

Special measures monitoring inspection of All Saints National Academy

Following my visit with Helen Forrest, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and Anne Potter, Ofsted Inspector (OI), to your school on 8 and 9 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 since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2018. 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 school 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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 local academy board, chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of St Chad's multi-academy trust (MAT), the director of education for the Diocese of Lichfield, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 8 June 2021 and 9 June 2021

Context

At the time of this inspection, three members of staff were on maternity leave and two staff were absent due to illness. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 were also on a school trip on day 1 of the inspection, so inspectors were unable to visit these classes.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

The progress made towards the removal of special measures has stalled since the last on-site monitoring visit in March 2020. Repeated school closures, significant staff and pupil absence, and the absence of on-site monitoring by the trust and local academy board due to COVID-19 restrictions have, without doubt, contributed to the reduced effectiveness of leaders' actions. At the time of this inspection, too many children in the early years are unable to read sufficiently well for their age and writing skills remain weak across the school. Curriculum development is not as developed as it should be in some subjects in order to enable pupils to know more and remember more. Also, pupils have very little knowledge of British values. This means they are not as well prepared for life in modern Britain as they should be.

Leaders have taken steps to design an effective curriculum. With the support of the trust, significant work has been undertaken to create detailed plans. These plans are in place for each year group and cover all subjects. Progression and sequencing are evident. However, on occasion, plans are not adhered to, and what is planned does not always translate into practice. For example, staff moved away from the planned curriculum to teach whole-school themes for five weeks during the third national lockdown. This means that some planned content was missed. Current plans have not been updated to reflect this or show when missed content will be covered. The school's curriculum approach is also heavily weighted towards developing cross-curriculum literacy. This is at the detriment of subject-specific knowledge, for example in religious education. As a result, pupils do not develop the depth of knowledge needed to retain information long term.

Subject leadership remains at an early stage of development in most areas. Leaders have developed action plans in their respective subject areas and have begun to monitor how well plans are implemented. They have received training from the director of learning, diocesan improvement adviser and senior leaders. However, there remain weaknesses in leaders' own subject knowledge, and some are very new to post due to recent changes made. The school does not currently have a music coordinator, as this subject is taught by an external service provider. There is a lack of monitoring and oversight by senior leaders of music provision.

Children have settled well in the early years. Children are happy and enjoy the well-resourced indoor and outdoor learning areas. Imaginative and enjoyable activities are planned. However, activities are task focused rather than learning focused. This

means that plans set out what children will do, but not what they will learn. Early reading and writing remain at the very early stages for many children. Too many are still at the starting points in phonics and lack the ability to decode and blend letters. This affects their confidence and ability to develop early reading skills. One girl said, 'I can't read,' when asked who she reads to. Similarly, several children are still unable to write their names. This means they are not sufficiently prepared to move into Year 1.

Reading is strongly promoted across the school. Key texts link to all class topics. All staff have received reading training, including phonics for key stage 2 staff. Pupils read daily in school and are encouraged to read regularly at home. Nevertheless, very few pupils spoken to could name an author. Phonics is taught from the outset and books are matched to the sounds pupils learn. However, home reading books are not always set at the right level – especially for lower ability pupils. These are often too difficult, and pupils struggle to read them. This affects their ability to develop reading fluency. Systems and interventions are in place to help the weakest readers catch up. A good range of books are available in classrooms, the school library or from the online library that was introduced when pupils were working at home.

Leaders have focused closely on writing this year, because they agree that outcomes, although rising, are still too low across the school. Training has been implemented to ensure that staff understand the school's approach to teaching writing. This is largely based on a class text but includes a planning, drafting and editing stage. However, a blend of different approaches and resources are mixed together. As a result, the process is overly complex and results in confusion for pupils. The approach to teaching letter formation, spelling, grammar and punctuation is also inconsistent. Consequently, pupils' skills in these areas remain weak. Pupils do not secure the key skills needed for simple sentence writing before moving on to more complex sentence work. This means that their writing lacks coherence and accuracy. Leaders' actions to bring about improvement in writing has therefore been too slow.

Leaders have taken effective action to improve the quality of education in mathematics. This subject is well led, well planned, and appropriately sequenced. Curriculum intent is established, coherent and comparable to national curriculum expectations. Training and the addition of supplementary resources have contributed to higher staff expectations and a more manageable workload. The mathematics leader has identified staff with weaker subject knowledge. She has modelled lessons and delivered one-to-one support for these staff. This term, adjustments have been made and additional mathematics sessions provided to help pupils catch up quickly. The leader is confident and quite rightly proud of mathematics development over the last three years. Pupils have positive attitudes to mathematics and say they enjoy their lessons.

Attendance continues to be a high priority for the school. Leaders have worked tirelessly to reduce persistent absence and had a good deal of success. Fewer pupils are now absent and attendance rates are rising. Leaders have changed the external support they commission. They feel the current provision is more stringent and effective. Attendance is tracked meticulously, and swift contact and follow up action are implemented for families who continue to cause concern. Leaders are now focused on improving punctuality.

Pupils and staff all say that behaviour has improved. This is evident in the reduced number of exclusions issued and behaviour incidents that occur. A new behaviour system has been introduced. This allows the subject leader to analyse incidents, detect types of behaviour and emerging patterns. Consequently, targeted assistance is appropriately directed to where it is needed. Staff feel well supported with behaviour management and value the nurture and emotional health programmes available to pupils. These programmes help ensure that the school is a calm and orderly environment.

Staff morale is high. All staff feel that the school has improved considerably under the leadership of the principal. They appreciate and greatly value the care and support she provides. Staff well-being and work-life balance are taken seriously. Regular contact was made with staff throughout the pandemic, and no emails are sent after 6pm.

Parents views of the school are also highly positive. They describe staff and the principal as 'caring, approachable and family orientated'. Relationships with parents have improved and there is now greater engagement and support for the school.

The local academy board continues to provide support and challenge to school leaders. It has ensured that they have kept up to date with curriculum developments throughout the pandemic period – albeit remotely. Members show a clear understanding of the school's priorities, as well as the daily challenges that leaders currently face. They are aware of where improvements have been made but also where weaknesses remain. They have a realistic and accurate view of the school.

Additional support

The trust and diocese have provided valuable support to staff and school leaders. The learning director and diocesan improvement adviser have a strong knowledge of the school. They have supported curriculum planning and subject leadership training, and have carried out monitoring and review activities to keep a check on the progress the school is making. The chief executive officer provides a high degree of scrutiny, challenge and support to staff and the local academy board.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and subject leaders, the chief executive officer and the director of learning of St Chad's Trust, and the diocesan improvement adviser. Inspectors spoke with pupils, staff, parents and representatives of those responsible for governance. Ofsted's surveys for staff and parents were also considered.