

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Julia Christou
Headteacher
King's Oak Academy
Parkway
Gaywood
King's Lynn
Norfolk
PE30 4QJ

Dear Mrs Christou

Special measures monitoring inspection of King's Oak Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 10 and 11 January 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in May 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other staff, trustees, the chief executive officer and other leaders of Unity Education Trust, the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also scrutinised the school's rapid action plan and audits of the provision in both the early years and for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). I met with curriculum leaders for reading, early years, history and geography. I visited a range of lessons, looked at pupils' work and listened to a group of pupils reading with an adult in the school. I met with teaching staff, support staff and with pupils. I also considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and responses to the staff survey. I reviewed a selection of safeguarding records, the single central record, behaviour records and documents relating to pupils with SEND. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

King's Oak Academy remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

There have been significant changes in leadership since the previous inspection. The previous headteacher left the school at the end of the last academic year. You were appointed as headteacher in September 2022. The assistant headteacher left the school in October 2022. The director of education and head of school effectiveness from the multi-academy trust have been supporting with leadership capacity during this time. The work that leaders have done has resulted in progress being made to address the key issues which were identified in the previous inspection. However, you are aware that there is still a significant amount of work to do to ensure that all pupils receive the high-quality education you want them to have.

One of the areas of weakness identified in the previous inspection was the teaching of early reading. Leaders made the decision to introduce a new phonics scheme across the school from September 2022. All staff have received comprehensive training in how to teach the new scheme. As a result, staff are developing their confidence and competence in the teaching of early reading. Pupils are beginning to develop their fluency through a consistent approach from staff to the teaching of reading. Reading books are now closely matched to the sounds pupils know and can read. This is helping some pupils who struggle with reading to catch up. Additional support for those pupils who are furthest behind with their reading is not yet consistently established. While pupils are beginning to improve their reading, the curriculum is still very new and is not yet taught as consistently well as leaders want it to be. The ongoing support and training that is being provided needs to continue so that more children develop the fluency and reading knowledge they need to be successful.

The early years foundation stage has been an area of focus for leaders. Audits into the quality of the early years phase has supported the early years leader to improve the provision. There is now a more structured curriculum in place. Activities are better matched to what staff want children to know and be able to do. Staff in the early years have remodelled the environment to ensure that all activities have more purpose. There has been some initial success with this. Precise language and key question prompts support staff with their conversations with children while they are learning. Reading and stories are a priority in both the Nursery and Reception and children enjoy listening to the stories adults read to them. Leaders know there is more work to do to ensure the provision is further enhanced and better focused when children are learning outside.

Leaders have made progress in developing staff's subject knowledge. A large amount of time has been spent training staff to teach phonics well. There has also been support provided to develop the roles of subject leaders. For example, humanities subject leaders have begun to review their curriculum areas working alongside the support of the trust's head of school effectiveness. Curriculum plans in history and geography are now well sequenced, with guidance provided to all staff to support them to teach these plans well.

This has supported teachers to see learning as a sequence of lessons which build to agreed endpoints. Leaders are clear that they need to carefully monitor the impact of this work and put processes in place to share what has been successful across other areas of the curriculum. There is also further work needed to support teaching assistants with developing their knowledge and understanding of how best to support the pupils they work with.

Work has begun to address the weaknesses identified in the provision for pupils with SEND. Pupils now have targets identified on pupil passports. There is a programme for reviewing these plans. Staff have received training in how to support pupils with SEND through a number of 'SEND surgeries'. Staff are appreciative of this. Pupils with SEND are better supported in class. The 'learning together' room now has more focus. This area is used for targeted support in the morning for pupils who require help settling into school. This support is timetabled, focused and helpful to these pupils. However, there is still a significant amount of work to do for pupils with SEND. Pupil passport targets are not routinely specific enough. They do not precisely identify what pupils' difficulties are, what support they need or how staff will be able to measure whether they have achieved them. This makes it hard for staff to know exactly how to support pupils with SEND in the classroom. This also has an impact on the running of interventions, such as reading tutoring, as staff are often unable to leave the classroom to deliver them. Further training and guidance are required to ensure that all staff know precisely how best to support all pupils with SEND.

During the previous inspection, behaviour was judged to require improvement. The most recent published absence figures also identified some weaknesses in attendance. You have worked to develop the culture of high attendance in the school and to engage the parental community. Feedback from parents has been, mostly, positive. A newly appointed behaviour and standards lead from the trust has helped the school to improve behaviour and attendance. There has been a reduction in low-level disruption in classes. As with support for SEND there is still work to do. Staff need clear guidance and strategies to enable them to successfully manage challenging behaviour when it occurs. Absence and persistent absence are also starting to improve, albeit gradually. Attendance must remain a priority for leaders as too many pupils are persistently absent from school. This has a detrimental impact on their learning.

Trustees and the school improvement board have an accurate understanding of where the school is making the most progress towards providing pupils with a high-quality education. Focused reviews of the rapid action plan ensure that targeted support is provided. School improvement board meetings hold leaders to account where progress is not as far along as it should be. Other schools within the trust have shared best practice with staff. Staff are appreciative of this opportunity to learn from others. This has helped to develop their knowledge. External support has been provided for training in phonics, to review SEND provision and to help with continuous provision in the early years. Some leaders have also begun to undertake training to support their development as leaders.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Unity Education Trust, a multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Williams
His Majesty's Inspector