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Dear Miss O'Callaghan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Gilbert Inglefield Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 16 and 17 April 2024, 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 June 2023.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, Wayne Jarvis (Ofsted Inspector) and I discussed with you, and other senior leaders and trustees, 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. We also visited lessons and met with a range of staff, including middle leaders. We spoke to and met with groups of pupils and observed their behaviour at breaktimes and lunchtimes. We examined a range of documentation and records relating to safeguarding and behaviour. I spoke to representatives from the local authority, the consultant executive headteacher, and the chief executive officer of the Pyramid Schools Trust, all of whom provide support to the school. I reviewed the 46 responses to the staff survey, the 115 responses and 95 free-text responses received during the inspection to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to be no longer judged as requiring special measures.

I am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership of the school. A new interim headteacher started in September 2023. She became permanent headteacher in February 2024. The school has expanded the number of middle and senior leaders to increase the capacity to improve the school. The school appointed a new deputy and two assistant headteachers in September 2023. It appointed additional staff to its pastoral and special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) teams. The school currently employs a consultant executive headteacher on a part-time basis to further support senior leaders in the school. Two new co-chairs have led the board of trustees since July 2023. There has also been a considerable turnover of staff. Five new members of staff started at the beginning of the summer term.

Leaders have taken rapid and effective action to establish effective systems and plans that were lacking at the time of the previous inspection. The school has a clear, well-considered plan to improve the quality of education for all pupils. This is regularly evaluated and updated.

The curriculum at Gilbert Inglefield Academy is broad and ambitious. It now defines the key knowledge that pupils need. All subjects now have clear, long-term curriculum plans. These provide a secure framework for pupils to build knowledge over time. In most subjects, such as English, these plans are appropriately detailed. This ensures that teachers are confidently informed about what leaders intend them to teach pupils and when. In some subjects, curriculum plans are at an earlier stage of development. Where this is the case, teachers are not as clearly able to identify the important knowledge that pupils need to achieve highly.

Pupils increasingly gain the breadth of knowledge that they need. This is because the quality of teaching is improving. Lessons are starting to follow a clear structure that revisits previous knowledge before introducing new topics. In the most effective lessons, teachers use engaging and well-planned hands-on activities that enable pupils to practise and discuss what they are learning. These tasks help make knowledge 'stick', and deepen pupils' understanding. However, some staff lack the confidence and subject knowledge to set ambitious tasks and do not always check how well pupils have learned. They do not always identify and tackle pupils' misconceptions. As a result, teachers do not always identify and close gaps in learning quickly enough. The school needs to provide teachers with further training that enables them to set and teach ambitious work for pupils, and to ensure they are confident in accurately checking how well pupils are doing.

The school now prioritises reading. Pupils read a range of well-chosen, diverse texts, particularly in form time and in English lessons. The school checks how well pupils can read. Staff identify those who find reading hard. They provide support, such as phonics interventions. This helps these pupils become accurate and fluent readers.

Pupils with SEND now have their needs identified in a timely manner. Teachers have clear information about the needs of pupils. The school has provided effective training to staff on how to adapt the curriculum. Consequently, teachers increasingly adapt the curriculum effectively so that pupils with SEND can access it. The school now has an area called 'The Hive' and a sensory room called 'The Ocean'. These welcoming, well-used areas support pupils with their well-being and help them get ready to focus on their work.

School leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Behaviour in lessons has improved considerably. Low-level disruption is much less common. Teachers ensure lessons start purposefully when they 'meet, greet and seat' pupils at the start. However, some staff do not have consistently high expectations of pupils' conduct. Some teachers tolerate too much off-task chatter. As a result, in some lessons, pupils are not always as focused on their learning as they should be. Most pupils treat each other, and adults, in a friendly way. Some pupils, especially younger ones, still find the behaviour of others too boisterous and rough, and they worry about being bullied.

The school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum teaches pupils about the importance of kindness and what is, and is not, acceptable language. This has reduced the use of discriminatory language, and bullying, by pupils. If pupils do not meet these expectations, adults provide effective support to help them to improve. The school uses sanctions appropriately. Some staff are, however, inconsistent in how they enforce the school's rules, for instance where pupils can play ball games. This confuses pupils and leads to poor behaviour that continues to worry some pupils.

Trustees have overseen a period of rapid and significant change in school. They now have a robust and accurate view of how well the school is doing. They check that pupils are safe. Trustees challenge and support leaders to improve the quality of education. Leaders are aware that more work is needed to embed consistent expectations of behaviour and to ensure high-quality teaching takes place across the curriculum. They have clear plans to do so.

Staff receive much more high-quality training, which is improving how they design and teach the curriculum. The school uses external support well to evaluate its provision and to provide training for staff. Staff increasingly work with other schools to develop their practice. The vast majority of staff feel well supported by leaders through this period of significant change.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Woodley
His Majesty's Inspector