

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 679 9146
Direct email: clare.benson@serco.com



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Mrs Andrea Healey
Headteacher
Big Wood School
Bewcastle Road
Warren Hill
Nottingham
NG5 9PJ

Dear Mrs Healey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Big Wood School

Following my visit with Nigel Boyd, additional inspector, to your school on 13–14 January 2015, 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, which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection, which took place in November 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time, the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Nottingham City Council and the Executive Principal of the Redhill Academy Trust.

Yours sincerely

Julia Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that rapid progress is made by all students by:
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations of students and set challenging targets for the progress they should make in the short and medium term in both English and mathematics
 - planning learning activities that stretch and challenge the most-able students, particularly in languages and mathematics
 - providing effective support and challenge for students with special educational needs and those who are at risk of underachieving
 - ensuring that marking and feedback to students is meaningful and consistent so that it allows students to reflect on the quality of their work and act upon areas for development.
- Further improve work already undertaken to improve the attendance of students in all year groups, but particularly the older students and those at risk of underachieving, so that attendance is at least in line with national averages.
- Improve the quality of leadership at all levels by:
 - setting targets for students which are challenging and clearly understood by both staff and students, and which will lead to at least good progress
 - ensuring that subject leaders, especially of English, foreign languages, mathematics and science, carry out their monitoring activities frequently and effectively so that school policies are consistently applied and underperformance is addressed quickly
 - further developing support plans which attend to the needs of students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, so that they can all achieve their potential and make good progress
 - ensuring that governors improve their skills in challenging school leaders and checking for themselves the effectiveness of improvement plans.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on insert date of inspection

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents including: the school improvement plan, school information about predicted student achievement in 2015, minutes of governing body meetings and a sample of students' books in English and mathematics. They met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the co-ordinator for special educational needs (SENCO), five subject leaders, the Executive Principal and the Consultant Principal from the Redhill Academy Trust and three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors held meetings with two groups of students. An inspector analysed 49 responses to the Ofsted staff survey. They observed students' learning in 15 parts of lessons, five of which were carried out jointly with members of the senior team. One inspector, accompanied by a member of the senior team, also visited a number of Year 9 lessons to look at students' attitudes to learning.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the proposed sponsorship of the school by the Redhill Academy Trust has been confirmed and is due to take place on 1 April 2015. A number of new appointments have been made including, a temporary science teacher, a part-time mathematics teacher, two teaching assistants and a pastoral support manager. An attendance improvement officer has been recruited internally. A lead practitioner, who works for the Redhill Academy Trust, spends two days a week supporting teaching in English.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The 2014 results were disappointing. The proportion of students gaining 5 A*-C grades, including English and mathematics, fell to below floor standard to 38%. The progress that these students made from their starting points remained similar to 2013, but this was still below national averages. Groups of students, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, under-achieved. Data provided by the school, show that those students identified as school action, are making less progress than they should in mathematics; and those identified as school action plus, are making less progress than they should in English. In 2014, there were some improvements to the progress made by disadvantaged students compared to their peers, but their achievement remained too low in comparison to other students nationally. Teachers' predictions of students' achievement were highly inaccurate, particularly in English and humanities. This meant that leaders did not always target additional support to the students who were most vulnerable.

Data provided by the school show that Year 11 students are likely to achieve significantly better results in 2015, particularly in English. School leaders have introduced appropriate internal and external systems to ensure improved accuracy of

teachers' assessments. All teachers are required to produce evidence to support their predicted grades and they are regularly challenged about this during line management meetings. The GCSE mock examinations in English were assessed externally and teachers were given feedback on their students' performance. Following these examinations, changes have been made to student groupings. The data show that disabled students and those with special educational needs are predicted to make less than expected progress in English and mathematics. Students' work in English and mathematics, demonstrate that while some improvements are evident, there is still variability in the progress that students make over time. Inspectors also noted that some students, particularly boys, have poor written communication skills. These are not being addressed sufficiently, which has an impact upon their achievement.

The quality of teaching

Leaders have rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching and inspectors judged that it has improved since the last visit. However, some inconsistencies remain. Teachers' expectations, in a number of subjects, are too low and students are given insufficient challenge. As a result, these students do not always engage fully in their learning and make less progress. Teachers do not always adapt work to meet the needs of different groups of students. Often, students all complete the same learning activity within a limited time scale. This results in non-completion of the activity by some and early completion by others, thus restricting their progress. Conversely, some teachers are highly skilled in adapting their teaching to meet the needs of students, including the most able. In a science lesson, the teacher demonstrated excellent questioning skills. He was able to coax high-level responses from all students, who made striking progress as a result. In a Year 11 English lesson, one teacher was conscious of students' potential and provided them with highly challenging work, to which they responded well. There are some inconsistencies, across subjects, in the way that teachers communicate learning intentions to students, leading to confusion. Leaders have recognised this and plan to address it.

Students' attitudes to learning are variable, particularly where teaching is weaker and in Year 9 lessons. Inspectors observed some off-task behaviour that teachers do not always address. In these lessons, students are often chatting quietly to their neighbour, which disturbs the learning of others. As a result, they sometimes get away with producing little or no work and their learning is limited.

Teachers' marking has continued to improve since the previous visit and all teachers have adopted the school marking policy. However, it is still irregular and inconsistencies remain. In some lessons, time is built-in for students to re-draft and correct work, including spelling errors. Students appreciate this opportunity to build upon their learning. However, not all teachers give students sufficient time to respond to advice. In mathematics, where student self-assessment is used, some teachers do not take time to check the accuracy of this. When marking, some teachers do not always address students' weak literacy skills, including poor spelling

and handwriting. Students' presentation of their work also varies in quality. Some students' books are scruffy, work is missing and inspectors saw examples of free-hand graphs in mathematics, with incorrect labelling of axes.

The school has recently introduced a number of key strategies to ensure that students with special educational needs are being supported and challenged effectively. Teachers and teaching assistants plan together using a 'support priority record'. As a result, teaching assistants provide increasingly effective support and teachers have an improved understanding of these students' needs.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The new Achievement and Pastoral Intervention Team (APIT) is now housed in a central base to aid more effective communication between its members. The team, led by an assistant headteacher, includes a new attendance improvement officer, who rigorously monitors attendance and visits families of students who are absent for more than three days. School leaders have employed a number of other effective strategies to improve attendance, including rewards for students with excellent attendance and a 'return to learning' interview for those who have been absent for more than five days. This process helps to ensure that effective support is given to these students to catch-up on their missed learning and reduce their risk of underachievement. Attendance has improved significantly this term and is above national levels. The attendance of disadvantaged and older students has also improved.

The new behaviour policy, produced in consultation with staff, is starting to become embedded. There is a clear staged approach to managing poor behaviour and the APIT team provide intervention and support at each stage. Since the previous monitoring visit, further training has taken place to empower teachers to tackle low-level disruption in lessons. Students report that there is now greater consistency in the way that teachers apply behaviour policy and say 'they are stricter now'. However, staff report that there are still some variations in the way that teachers manage behaviour.

School leaders have introduced a new system of cumulative exclusions, mirroring the system used by the new sponsor. Last term, the percentage of students, excluded for one day or more, increased rapidly, particularly in Year 11. There are early signs that students are starting to respond positively to these harsher sanctions, particularly in the younger year groups.

Form tutors are having an increasingly effective role in preparing students for learning. Inspectors observed one tutor, checking students' equipment, praising them for their improvements in behaviour and encouraging their good attendance. As a result, these students had a highly positive start to the school day. Students' behaviour around the school site is positive. There is an appropriate number of staff present at lunchtime and these staff are pro-active in ensuring that students are punctual for lessons.

School leaders make appropriate referrals to the local authority in a timely manner. Recent staff training has taken place to alert all staff to other potential safeguarding issues, detailed in the latest statutory guidance, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, DFE, April 2014.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher, ably supported by her senior team, is providing the school community with a greater clarity of purpose. Inspectors witnessed a culture of urgency and a clear sense of direction. One leader said, 'the results in 2014 were a further wake up call.' Leaders have made significant improvements in a number of areas since the previous monitoring inspection. They provide a consistent message about ensuring high aspirations and expectations for all students. This is reflected in the aspirational targets for all students. Staff are highly supportive of the leadership team and all staff agreed that they are proud to be members of the school.

The leadership of teaching is becoming increasingly effective. This is a result of a more accurate system for monitoring the quality of teaching, effective performance management systems, and highly tailored professional development opportunities for teachers. Subject leaders, have greater clarity about their core function of improving the quality of teaching in their areas. This term, they have fewer operational tasks and are given time to carry out their essential role of monitoring the activities of their staff and checking on the achievement of their students. Senior leaders regularly monitor the work of these subject leaders through fortnightly meetings. This heightens their understanding of the role and provides them with greater accountability.

The SENCO is developing new education and health care plans in line with local authority guidance. In addition, he has re-developed individual teaching support plans for all disabled students and those with special educational needs. These include effective strategies and advice for teachers. Leaders have also introduced detailed pastoral support plans for those vulnerable students who are regularly excluded, to ensure that their barriers to learning are addressed. Both plans are still in their early stages of development, so their impact is not evident.

Governors are providing increasing challenge to school leaders. Specified governors now have a link to individual faculties and this has allowed them to streamline their support. The school improvement plan has been amended since the previous monitoring visit to include ambitious targets for the coming academic year. It is a comprehensive document, but still lacks measurable success criteria, linked to each of the milestones. This limits governors' ability to evaluate progress during the year.

External support

Leaders have embraced the support provided by the new sponsor. In particular, the Consultant Principal has provided highly effective coaching. This has resulted in the

improved confidence and resilience of the leadership team. The Consultant Principal has focused his support on improving the quality of teaching and developing clearer systems for tracking students' achievement. Subject leaders value the opportunities to network with staff from Redhill Academy and all involved regard this as a two-way partnership. The local authority continues to offer valuable support, particularly around improvements in attendance. Due to the increased support from the academy sponsor, the support from the local authority has been appropriately reduced.