

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 9154
Direct email: aidan.dunne@serco.com



26 February 2015

Mrs Emma Paramor & Mr Garry Walker
Acting Headteachers
Ramsden Hall School
School Lane
Langham
Colchester
CO4 5PA

Dear Mrs Paramor & Mr Walker

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ramsden Hall School

Following my visit with Anthony Sharpe, Her Majesty's Inspector (designate), to your school on 24–25 February 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014. 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services, Essex.

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- The Secretary of State

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good on the Billericay site by making sure that:
 - teachers plan interesting and challenging work
 - marking is used effectively to help students to improve their work
 - teachers set work at the right level, particularly for the more-able students.
- Improve students' behaviour and safety, particularly on the Billericay site by ensuring that:
 - fixed term exclusions and racist incidents decrease
 - attendance improves further throughout the school
 - the behaviour policy is understood by all staff and students, applied consistently by staff and its effectiveness checked by leaders.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels, especially on the Billericay site, including governance, by making sure that:
 - accurate records which track students' past and current progress are used effectively by leaders to evaluate the school's work and by teachers in planning their lessons
 - the roles of subject leaders are developed, particularly in English and mathematics, so that teaching and achievement improve
 - governors and other leaders promote a shared understanding of good practice in teaching and learning across both sites, to secure equal access to a similarly good standard of education and support for all students.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should also be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 24-25 February 2015

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents and incident logs. Each site has its own leadership team and staff. Inspectors therefore met with the acting headteachers of each of the two sites, members of the senior leadership teams and other members of staff, a representative of the interim executive board (IEB), and a representative from the local authority. Informal meetings were held with two groups of students. The inspectors also spoke to other staff and students.

Context

The school is situated on two sites which are 40 miles apart. Since the previous monitoring visit, the school has employed an acting headteacher for the Billericay site. The acting headteacher of the Langham site remains in post. The school also commissions the work of a consultant headteacher across both sites.

Each of the two sites is now acting as a separate school. This is in readiness for the Langham site imminently to become an academy. Discussions between the local authority and the Department for Education are continuing about the future of the Billericay site. Ofsted will continue to monitor the Billericay site.

On the Billericay site, three staff are currently on long-term sick. These absences are being covered by an external supply teacher and by senior staff.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The discrepancy in achievement of students at the two sites, identified in the previous inspection, remains. Variations in the quality of teaching mean that, across the sites, students do not have equal opportunities to achieve well. In particular, some teachers' low expectations of what students can achieve results in significant differences in attainment between subjects and between sites.

Progress on the Billericay site remains inadequate and is hampered by a lack of subject expertise and student absence from the classroom. Leaders and managers still have not implemented the systems necessary to monitor the quality of teaching and how well it enables students to achieve. For example, teachers here do not use agreed processes for supporting students to understand how well they are progressing. Students do not have opportunities to learn independently, for example from the support of displays. Lesson observations and the scrutiny of students' work during the inspection highlighted weaknesses in teaching, which are consistent with the inadequate progress students make over time. While there has been some recent improvement in the quality of learning in mathematics lessons, this is not yet

evident in students' longer-term progress. Teachers do not have an accurate understanding of students' starting points so do not meet learning needs appropriately, nor are they able to demonstrate what progress students are making.

Students on the Langham site demonstrate good progress in many subjects, most particularly in English and mathematics. Good teaching and the positive attitudes to learning this encourages make sure that students focus on their learning for sustained periods of time. Accurate assessment enables teachers to match work to the needs and abilities of students, allowing them to progress well.

The quality of teaching

Due to insufficient action being taken since the last monitoring visit, teaching on the Billericay site remains inadequate. Staff display little common understanding of the features of good teaching. Pupils commented during the inspection on the differences in the quality of teaching: they know which teachers expect them to work hard, and who will give them interesting and challenging tasks to do. They also know where, when and with whom they can get away with doing very little work. The expectation of students and pace of lessons is often slow which results in students deciding not even to enter classes or to leave a lesson prematurely. Because teachers' planning rarely takes into account the current skills or abilities of the students, they are not always given work which challenges them. Where they are appropriately challenged, they are able to make rapid progress. For example, in mathematics students are quick to engage with the activities offered, and are challenged at the right level. A marking policy has been introduced, but agreed strategies are not used well by all teachers. Even where marking is completed, there is little evidence that students have the opportunity to respond to the advice they are given. As a result, they frequently make the same mistakes again.

The strong subject knowledge of teachers on the Langham site continues to secure good progress. Students are quick to start their work, apply themselves diligently, and respond well to the adults supporting them. Teachers have knowledge of prior learning to hand and actively intervene where students are capable of making better progress. The range of extra support available to students ensures that academic and emotional progress is equally well developed.

Teachers on the Langham site now put the students' needs at the centre of their planning. As a result, they plan lessons in English and mathematics which directly reflect the gaps in students' knowledge which have been identified through systematic checking of what they already know. Students are able to explain what they have understood and what they need to do to make even faster progress. They enjoy the challenge and therefore often live up to their teachers' high expectations.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The safety of students on the Billericay site remains inadequate. The lack of a rigorous referral system results in gaps in staff knowledge about the whereabouts of students. As a result, students often leave classrooms and other learning environments and wander the site unsupervised. Students on this site were also observed to be smoking by inspectors. Some go to the edge of the site to smoke, placing themselves at risk. Because of weaknesses in teaching, students often show poor attitudes to learning and low-level disruptive behaviour occurs frequently in lessons. Students' poor behaviour regularly disturbs the learning of others.

Students are occasionally sent home when their behaviour is poor. The extent of this approach to managing behaviour is not fully known due to the lack of rigour in accurately recording this information. In addition, registers are incorrectly used to record the reasons for the absence of some students. These practices are unacceptable. Changes made to the behaviour policy are still not consistently applied at Billericay. Although the number of serious behavioural incidents has decreased, the refusal of students to engage in learning has increased, resulting in more students out of more lessons more often. While nurture provision has been recently introduced, it is too early to understand whether this is making a difference.

The use of outreach support and alternative provision is well-managed by Langham staff, and the addition of in-reach provision, where Year 6 pupils from other schools attend the Langham site, is appropriately meeting the needs of pupils who are on the roll of mainstream schools, but who need additional help.

Extra support for pupils on the Langham site is suitably matched to their needs; it includes planned interventions to support pupils who have difficulties in managing their own behaviour and controlling their response to others. The recording of incidents of poor behaviour shows a significant decrease in the number of physical interventions that have been necessary since the acting headteacher returned to the site full-time.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership and management of the school are inadequate due to the significant and serious discrepancies in outcomes across the two sites. There continue to be inadequacies in the safeguarding of students on the Billericay site because checks that should be made are incomplete, and statutory records are not securely up to date.

The turbulence in leadership has led to a lack of clarity around leadership roles and responsibilities. While they have job descriptions, these do not accurately reflect the recent changes to areas of responsibility given to senior team members. Leadership is weak and staff are not held to account. Due to the significant absence on the Billericay site, senior staff are often called to cover for missing colleagues. This

reduces their capacity to monitor, evaluate and plan for improvement. As a consequence, few improvements are seen, staff morale has declined and the quality of teaching has suffered.

The curriculum for students who attend the Billericay site fails to meet their needs. It lacks breadth and relevance, and does not take into account their aspirations for the future. It does not prepare students well for the next stage in their learning or training.

Greater capacity in leadership and management on the Langham site is ensuring continuing improvements in students' behaviour and in their attitudes to learning. Senior leaders make their high expectations clear. Pupils are challenged to learn, and know that all staff have the same high expectations of their behaviour.

Leaders at both sites have adopted a revised planning structure which is based on short term actions. While this has increased the sense of urgency for these actions to be taken, it means the wider vision for whole school improvement is unclear.

The IEB fulfils its role appropriately and offers support and challenge to the senior team. Nevertheless its effectiveness at the Billericay site has been limited. Members have commissioned the support of appropriately skilled external consultants to bring about improvement. The IEB has a good understanding of the weaknesses in provision at the Billericay site but has yet to build the necessary capacity within the staff team to move this forward. However, IEB members have not adequately monitored all key documents including the single central record and the school action plan.

External support

The local authority has guaranteed substantial financial support for the planned intervention work of external consultants. Both the local authority and the IEB have an accurate understanding of the challenges faced by the school, and the strengths and weaknesses of the provision on both sites. The local authority and the school's external consultant have aided the school in its attempts to recruit staff, and to increase the capacity of senior leaders. However, the recruitment of high quality staff remains an issue on the Billericay site.

Priorities for further improvement:

- leaders and managers must take immediate action to rectify the flaws in safeguarding identified at the Billericay site
- rapidly improve development planning so that intended successes are clear and rigorous monitoring arrangements are identified. Ensure members of the IEB and all staff understand what improvements are expected and how and when they will be measured.