

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



11 November 2015

Mr Garry Walker
Headteacher
Ramsden Hall School
Heath Road
Ramsden Heath
Billericay
Essex
CM11 1HN

Dear Mr Walker

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ramsden Hall School

Following my visit to your school on 20–21 October 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 fifth 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:

leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection. This appointment may be made to any area of the school but the responsibility for their induction and support must remain with a member of the senior team.

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 Essex.

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

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 most-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 fifth monitoring inspection on 20–21 October 2015

Evidence

Meetings were held with you, the newly appointed acting deputy headteacher, the new acting assistant headteacher and the acting senior teacher. I met with the consultant headteacher, members of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority. I visited classrooms throughout the school, some together with you and some with the acting deputy headteacher. I scrutinised

school documents, including records of the monitoring of teaching and achievement, and leaders' reports to the IEB. I met with a group of pupils about their transition into the school and spoke to pupils in lessons. With the acting deputy headteacher I looked at a sample of pupils' work. Safeguarding records were checked and health and safety information reviewed.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of staff changes. The new acting deputy headteacher took up her post at the start of the academic year; she had previously been an acting assistant headteacher at the school. A new acting assistant headteacher has taken up his role. Two members of teaching staff have left the school and one new teacher has been appointed. One member of staff is currently on long-term illness leave. This position is being covered by a supply teacher. One other supply teacher is working in the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders and staff are now confident that the needs of pupils are more accurately identified when they start at the school. The introduction of Redwood as a safe learning space for new Year 7 pupils is providing a thoughtful and carefully planned and structured learning environment for them. This is actively promoting positive behaviour and is encouraging pupils to engage independently in their learning. These changes are already resulting in a reduced number of physical interventions for the new pupils this term. Pupils in Redwood describe well how this provision is supporting them to feel they belong in the school. Staff quickly respond to any challenges presented by the pupils and enable them to understand the implications of their behaviour on others when they manage these difficulties. Pupils say they want to be a part of this happy and lively learning environment and the Year 7 pupils' attendance is high.

It remains difficult for leaders and members of the IEB to be precise about the progress pupils have made from their starting points because historical assessments made of pupils' achievements are now known to be inaccurate. This has been remedied through work with other schools and agencies to moderate and test out teachers' assessments. Leaders are now confident that the understanding they have of pupils' achievement is correct.

Leaders are beginning to ensure that the additional funding made available to provide extra personal and academic support for disadvantaged pupils is used more effectively. A review of this aspect of the school's work has been undertaken and the recommendations made are being addressed. An example of this is the range of tracking systems that have been implemented which enable staff to accurately and quickly take action when pupils start to fall behind their peers. Wider aspects of learning skills, for example pupils' independence, are included so staff are able to plan more opportunities and wider learning activities such as forest schools or work

experience. Staff are beginning to understand much better what works well to enable each pupil to learn well.

Scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work shows that teachers have increasingly high expectations in some subjects. For example in English in Year 10, pupils are being supported to make very rapid progress. For instance, in an example of one pupils' work it was clear to see that more regular attendance in lessons is enabling him to write for purpose, adding to his work and extending his writing with pride, following feedback from his teacher. Some inconsistencies remain because of the historically low expectations that have hindered pupils' progress.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders and staff are rightly proud of the obvious improvements made to the learning environments, which are supporting pupils to learn better and have raised the quality of teaching. There are now a significant number of good teachers, who have high expectations of pupils both in their work and in their attitude to learning, and this is ensuring that the work of pupils and staff is continually improving.

The rigorous monitoring of teaching by the acting deputy headteacher and the high quality support and challenge given by members of the IEB and advisers from the local authority have led to more teaching improving, to be now at least good. Where learning is at its best, teachers role-model their expectations of young people in their own behaviour, the way they communicate and the way they present work and prepare the learning environment. These teachers question pupils effectively to check their understanding and to challenge them further in their thinking. For example, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson, the teacher's good planning and detailed knowledge of the current attainment of the group meant she planned highly individualised learning tasks. These were aimed at checking through with pupils what they already knew and then challenging them to use that knowledge to solve more difficult tasks. Pupils respond well to this challenge and quickly try hard to demonstrate their ability and to join in the lesson.

Where teaching remains weaker, teachers do not effectively use assessment information to plan work which matches the different needs and abilities of pupils. These lessons lack challenge so pupils quickly become bored and try to avoid them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Rates of serious incidents of poor behaviour and exclusions are continuing to reduce because the confidence and ability of staff to manage them is increasing. Staff training enables them to use a shared approach and a common language to communicate with pupils in crisis. As a result, even when intervention is needed, issues are resolved quickly.

The points system for rewarding good behaviour seen at my last visits is now embedded and, following pupils' requests, points are now also made available at lunchtime. Rewards can now be gained if pupils behave well and use good manners in the dining area. Increasing external links are helping to make rewards more relevant to pupils. For example, this type of good behaviour can result in a trip to a local restaurant.

The number of missed or part missed lessons has been hugely reduced. This is a significant indicator of how well leaders are improving pupils' learning and behaviour. In January this year, there were 275 recorded incidents. In July, there were 34. This much reduced number has continued this term. Overall attendance at the end of last year was well below the national average. It has already increased significantly this term. Figures are affected by the number of pupils who are on the school's roll but who do not receive full-time education.

Information gathered about pupils' views shows how important they feel it is to be given a second chance and they are grateful that this is happening now. Leaders listened to the older pupils when they said that more needed to be done for new younger pupils. As a result, the staff created Redwood as a safe and secure learning environment where new pupils are helped to settle. They take part in baseline assessments so staff know how to help them learn. They also are taught an understanding of the systems and approaches of the school. Careful thought has been given to ensuring that highly skilled staff support pupils to settle in to school and behave appropriately. Older pupils say that Year 7 pupils are not as annoying as they have been in the past and do not disrupt the learning of others.

Pupils also told leaders that their lessons were too long and that it was difficult for them to concentrate for such a long period of time in one space without a break or physical activity. Leaders recognised this and have made lessons shorter, increased the number of lessons during the day and ensured that pupils are supported when they move between lessons so there is now little disruption either in or between lessons. There is support available to ensure that transitions to the next lessons are smooth.

Pupils who are consistently achieving high points scores and who meet the increased expectations of staff are given 'graduate status'. Pupils know this means they can earn the right not to wear uniform and many try hard to attain this status.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have an accurate view of how well the school is doing and what needs to be done to continue its improvement. The focus for this work has been short-term until now. Leaders are beginning to develop their long-term vision for the school and as a result, staff are more confident that the school's future is secure.

Senior leaders have become effective role models for other staff. They continually develop the quality of their work. The well-planned programme of training for staff is

helping them to improve their practice. Leaders' committed approach to improving the work of the school has earned them the respect of staff and pupils.

IEB members' responsibilities are now directly linked to an aspect of school improvement. They have high expectations of the leadership team and challenge leaders about information in the reports they present to meetings. It is clear that they now rigorously hold leaders to account for the outcomes of pupils. Leaders say that members' challenge is very helpful because it deepens their understanding of what is needed to make the school even better. The IEB has developed its capacity further by appointing a new board member whose responsibility is to support the way in which pupils' outcomes and progress are recorded. The acting assistant head teacher is very new but already his input to the developing leadership team is strong and is contributing to improvement. He is supporting colleagues to improve their practice and is establishing himself as a strong role model, quickly earning the respect of many of the pupils.

Leaders have changed the curriculum to include subjects which are more relevant to pupils in years 9, 10 and 11. This is beginning to increase the interest of the majority of pupils in their learning. Leaders' determination to provide appropriate subjects, even when the resources are not readily available, and their willingness to teach new subjects, such as languages, are adding new depth and breadth to the curriculum. Leaders have plans in place to ensure that the health and safety requirements related to these rapid changes are addressed. For example, safety signage has not been updated in some teaching spaces.

The IEB has identified a preferred sponsor. The sponsors have made visits to the school and the leadership and IEB have confidence in both their knowledge and approach to working with the pupils and staff of this school.

External support

The local authority continues to provide appropriate support and challenge to leaders through regular monitoring, meetings and through the continued work of the consultant headteacher. Advisers' work has supported the acting deputy headteacher to robustly monitor teaching. Their validation of leaders' judgements has given members of the IEB confidence that they have an accurate understanding of the school. Leaders and members use this information when making decisions about salary increases for staff.