

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



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Tony Wilson
Headteacher
Small Heath School
Muntz Street
Small Heath
Birmingham
B10 9RX

Dear Mr Wilson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Small Heath School

Following my visit with Nardeep Sharma, Ofsted Inspector and Thomas Walton, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 24 and 25 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015. 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 not taking effective action 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 for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2015

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - securing effective working relationships between the headteacher and senior and middle leaders
 - ensuring that the headteacher and leaders work with all colleagues in creating a vision for school improvement that is clearly communicated and widely shared across the school
 - strengthening systems for measuring performance which hold staff and leaders clearly and equitably to account for students' progress across the school
 - ensuring a regular supply of high quality information on students' progress which allows leaders and staff in the main school and sixth form to compare the performance of key groups of students with that of other students nationally.
- Improve achievement, particularly in mathematics and for disabled students and those with special educational needs, by:
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information to plan work which supports the progress of those who find learning difficult, and deepens the knowledge and understanding of those who are more able in each class
 - reviewing the systems for identifying and designating students with special educational needs, designing more appropriate packages of support for students with special educational needs and systematically evaluating their impact
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are well trained to provide effective numeracy interventions to those who find mathematics difficult.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that the marking and assessment of students' work is regular, informative, and is used systematically by students to correct or improve their work
 - securing consistently higher standards of presentation of work, especially for boys.
- Strengthen the governance of the school by:
 - establishing a forum or committee for more thorough and regular checks on standards and achievement
 - establishing more direct links between governors and school staff and subject departments to gain first-hand information about the school
 - appointing a governor for special education needs provision, as required by the new Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and visited parts of lessons, some jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the chair and two other members of the interim executive board (IEB), the headteacher of King Edward VI Five Ways School, who is providing support for Small Heath, three groups of middle leaders and four groups of pupils. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative of the local authority over the telephone. Inspectors spoke informally with many pupils and several members of staff and they considered 95 responses to a staff questionnaire.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the headteacher has left the school and has been replaced by the interim headteacher who took up post on 1 September 2015. A deputy headteacher has been seconded into the school from King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy, an assistant headteacher has been internally promoted to acting deputy headteacher and the senior leadership team has been supplemented by two external consultants.

One deputy headteacher is currently on sickness absence from school. A new deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers are due to join the school in January 2016, at which time the school will have a complete and permanent senior leadership team.

September 2015 saw 21 new members of staff join the school, 14 of whom are teachers. It also saw the introduction of a new management information system across the school.

An external review of provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs has been carried out.

Members of the three teaching professional associations have taken a total of five days of industrial action, three of which have been since the last monitoring inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

Standards of achievement at the school continue to fall. Unvalidated GCSE results for 2015 saw the headline figure for five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, decline for the third consecutive year to 45%. The proportion of pupils

making at least expected progress in mathematics fell a little from 2014 and remains low. The proportion of pupils making at least expected progress in English also fell a little but remains broadly average. Pupils made less than expected progress in most subjects, including business studies, expressive arts, French, Spanish, history and physical education.

The achievement of disadvantaged pupils declined more than their peers and, as a result, attainment gaps widened. The large attainment gap between boys and girls narrowed a little, but only because girls' results declined more than boys'.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs continue to underachieve because too many teachers do not plan activities that help these pupils to make enough progress.

Outcomes in the sixth form also declined in 2015. AS level results plummeted, with 43% of entries being ungraded and, as a result, nearly a half of Year 12 learners did not return to Year 13 in September. Outcomes were particularly poor in physics, chemistry and biology. The decline in A2 results seen in 2014 continued into 2015 and gaps between girls and boys and between disadvantaged learners and others both widened. Leaders recognise weaknesses in the sixth form and are currently reviewing 16–19 provision.

At GCSE, AS level and A level, teachers' forecasts of their pupils' results were very inaccurate and so leaders and teachers expected much better outcomes. Teachers' forecasts of results for 2016 suggest that outcomes will improve, but leaders, rightly, have no confidence in these predictions.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has not improved since the section 5 inspection in January 2015. While there are pockets of good teaching around the school, and the quality of presentation in pupils' books has improved a little, significant weaknesses remain across subjects and key stages.

Teachers' planning remains weak in many lessons, and so activities are neither engaging nor well matched to pupils' level of ability. Some pupils, especially those with special educational needs, struggle to complete set tasks because they do not understand them, and they do not receive sufficient support. Other pupils, especially the most able, find activities too easy and lacking in challenge. They are not stretched in their learning and so make less progress than they should.

In too many lessons, teachers do not expect their pupils to think hard or develop a deep understanding of the subject. Teachers are too ready to accept brief answers from pupils and then fill in the detail themselves, rather than challenging pupils to refine their answers and so deepen their understanding of the work. Teachers do not

engage pupils in learning using interesting or varied resources and there is an overreliance on repetitive worksheets in many subjects, which do not stretch, challenge or inspire pupils to deepen their understanding of their work.

The school's marking and feedback policy is not being followed consistently by all staff. As a result, the quality of marking and feedback that teachers give varies considerably between subjects and within subjects. For example, inspectors saw books which were marked regularly, with detailed comments about how to improve and clear evidence that the pupil had acted upon this advice. However, inspectors also saw other books, sometimes from the same subject, where there was little or no marking and no evidence that the pupil had improved subsequent work.

Teaching in the sixth form shares the weaknesses in teaching throughout the school. Expectations are low, and too many lessons are dull. For example, in several sixth form lessons, learners spent significant amounts of time copying sections from textbooks with no obvious purpose.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils usually behave well in lessons and also as they move around the school and at break and lunchtime. They are generally polite, courteous and keen to do well. In some lessons, where teaching is weaker, pupils drift off task and chatter, but it is to their credit that pupils usually behave well even when their lessons are dull. Leaders have introduced a 'zero tolerance policy' towards disruption of lessons where pupils who disrupt learning are removed and placed in 'internal exclusion'. As a result, the use of this sanction has increased when compared with last year, but the number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen slightly over the same period.

Some staff expressed concerns about behaviour, especially at lunchtime, and school records confirm a peak in incidents towards the end of lunchtimes. Due to threatened industrial action, senior leaders recently withdrew plans to shorten the lunchtime.

Pupils remain proud of their school and positive about it, although several Year 11 pupils expressed concern about the impact that the industrial action is having on their education. Pupils' attendance remains well above the national average for secondary schools.

Staff are aware of their responsibilities to keep pupils safe and they are comprehensively trained in recognising potential threats to pupils' safety, such as spotting the signs of, and how to tackle, extremism. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe from a range of possible dangers including different forms of bullying. School records indicate that bullying is rare, and this is confirmed by pupils, who also believe that adults in the school deal with

bullying well. Despite these positive aspects, there are some concerns that leaders are tackling.

The IEB has recorded concerns about the safety of pupils when they travel between the school's two sites. Following an incident last year, when two pupils were confronted by a member of the public, the local authority carried out a risk assessment on the school's behalf. School leaders are investigating strategies that should reduce or eliminate movement between the two sites in the future. In the meantime, leaders have reminded pupils of the importance of road safety through assemblies, and have also provided some staff supervision of movement between sites.

In the last academic year, leaders made two referrals to the local authority because of allegations that members of staff had manhandled pupils. These were found to be unfounded. As a result, the school provided refresher training for all staff at the start of term about appropriate physical contact with pupils. Despite this training, there have been two more similar referrals this term and, as a result, leaders are revising and repeating the training very shortly.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school remains in a perilous state where deep-seated divisions between staff are seriously hindering and slowing its rate of improvement.

Fractured relationships and deep fault lines in the school's staff remain, but these have changed since the section 5 full inspection and the last monitoring inspection. The senior leadership team is now a united group with clear roles and responsibilities and a shared vision of what needs to be done to move the school forward.

Previous divisions reported between senior leaders and middle leaders are now not clearly drawn. Middle leaders form a disparate and disunited group. Some are frustrated by what they perceive as senior leaders' attempts to make changes without consultation, while others are frustrated by what they perceive as their colleagues' repeated blocking and attempts to derail improvements that senior leaders are trying to make.

The views of the rest of the staff, as expressed directly to inspectors and through questionnaires, tend to fall into the same two opposing camps as the middle leaders. Many reported frustration with the slow rate of improvement in the school, and some reported that they feel too intimidated and scared to defy industrial action or to support the school's senior leaders.

The new headteacher, supported by the senior leadership team, has an accurate view of the school's many weaknesses and has produced detailed plans that tackle,

head on, those areas that urgently need to be improved. The school improvement plan is now fit for purpose. However, several planned actions have not yet been implemented, and so there is little evidence of improvement, especially in the quality of teaching across the school.

Leaders do not have a detailed view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the whole school, in different subjects or for individual teachers. As a result, support and training is not targeted at the areas, subjects and individuals where it is most needed, and therefore teaching is not improving.

Performance management has not been used effectively to improve the quality of teaching in the school. Leaders have very recently launched a revised performance management policy, but it is too early for it to have had any impact as yet.

Information about pupils' progress is not used well across the school. The implementation of a new management information system in September did not go well, and the start to the year was seriously disrupted by timetable errors.

Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment are not accurate and when this is combined with their lack of confidence in using the school's new systems, the overall effect is that the school's data about pupils' current progress are incomplete, unreliable and not understood. As a result, leaders do not have a clear idea about which pupils are currently underachieving and there is limited targeted intervention to help them catch up.

The IEB, which replaced the school's governing body in March 2015, brings considerable commitment and expertise to the school. Members' energies to date have focused on securing the school's senior leadership and ensuring that they fulfil all required statutory duties. These include making plans to address the school's precarious financial state, facing as it does a significant budget deficit in the next financial year. The progress of the IEB's improvement plan has been hindered by the ongoing industrial action.

The IEB now has two sub-committees, one focusing on teaching and learning and the other on finance and estates. As a result, members are now better able to support and challenge leaders, and specifically to evaluate the success of the actions within the school improvement plan.

External support

The school receives effective support from the King Edward VI Foundation. The headteacher of King Edward VI Five Ways School, who was providing leadership support to the school in the summer term, now advises the IEB and mentors the headteacher. The capacity of the senior leadership team has been temporarily increased by the secondment of a deputy headteacher from King Edward VI Sheldon

Heath Academy, and the Foundation has provided specific help with science and data management.

The IEB has also sourced temporary additional capacity for the school's senior leadership team through two part-time consultants who support with the curriculum, special educational needs, safeguarding, personal development, behaviour and welfare.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve learners' achievement in the sixth form by ensuring that:
 - all learners are taking courses that are appropriate for their academic ability
 - all teachers are skilled and effective in teaching sixth form courses, particularly in assessing learners' work
 - learners who are falling behind receive prompt, expert intervention to help them catch up.
- Ensure that further action is taken to reduce the potential risks associated with pupils travelling between the two school sites.
- Provide all staff with further training, guidance and support in appropriate physical contact with pupils.