

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



29 December 2015

Mrs Mary Gould
Head of School
The Matthew Arnold School
Kingston Road,
Staines
TW18 1PF

Dear Mrs Gould

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Matthew Arnold School

Following my visit with Matthew Newberry, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Jennifer Bray, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 9–10 December 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and the 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 academy board and the Director of Children's Services for Surrey.

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - raise their expectations of what students can achieve, plan tasks that are sufficiently demanding and challenge students to give their best when their work does not meet the required standard
 - make better use of information about students' prior learning and attainment when planning especially for those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, so that work is matched more closely to meet their learning needs.
- Urgently improve the achievement of all students by:
 - improving standards of work in English, mathematics and science
 - increasing the percentage of students achieving the highest GCSE grades
 - improving the quality of students' writing in all their subjects so that they are not held back by their weak written communication skills
 - ensuring that teachers' accurately mark students' work, especially in English, to provide clear guidance to students' on how to improve their learning, is used to set challenging targets and to identify students who are falling behind
 - sharing the methods that more successful departments are using to raise standards.
- Improve students' behaviour and safety by:
 - making sure all students meet an acceptable standard of behaviour in lessons so that time is not lost
 - ensuring students take pride in what they do and challenging them to do better when their work is scruffy or when they are disrespectful
 - rigorously checking on student absence, particularly those eligible for additional funding
 - ensuring the record of bullying incidents is clearly organised and rigorously monitored so all bullying incidents are properly followed up.
- Improve leadership and governance by:
 - ensuring the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding are robust and put into practice well
 - making sure that when leaders evaluate the quality of teaching there is greater emphasis on the impact of teaching on students' achievement
 - leaders giving governors the information they need and governors using the information rigorously to hold leaders to account.

Report on the monitoring inspection on 2–3 December 2015

Evidence

Inspectors analysed the academy's work and met with the executive headteacher, director of learning from the Bourne Educational Trust (BET), head of school, other senior staff and middle leaders, and groups of pupils. A telephone conversation took place with the chair of the interim academy board (IAB). Inspectors observed 25 lessons all of which were jointly observed with academy leaders. A range of documents were analysed including the academy improvement plan, policies and pupils' performance information.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, 22 teachers have left and 20 teachers have joined the academy. New appointments in September included a deputy headteacher, a special educational needs coordinator and subject leaders for science and technology.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders were rightly disappointed that GCSE results for pupils in summer 2015 were lower than expected. Steps taken by the academy to raise achievement did not generate an improvement in the GCSE results. The proportion of pupils achieving five GCSEs, including English and mathematics, at grade C or above did not improve significantly (43% in 2015 compared with 42% in 2014). The proportion of pupils making expected progress in English increased but was still below the national average. However, the proportion of pupils making expected progress in mathematics decreased considerably. Overall, 44% of the pupils achieved a grade C or better in both English and mathematics. However, only 22% of disadvantaged pupils achieved this important benchmark. The performance of disadvantaged pupils in the academy is declining, particularly in mathematics.

The academy's focus on improving standards of teaching and learning is starting to make a difference. There are some encouraging signs of improving achievement for current pupils, particularly in English, science, modern foreign languages and humanities. Lesson observations, analysis of pupils' work and feedback from Key Stage 4 pupils indicate that expectations have improved. Pupils demonstrate improved commitment in the classroom and much more positive attitudes towards learning.

Senior leaders are well aware of the urgent need to improve pupils' achievement in many subject areas. Following publication of the 2015 GCSE results, leaders acted decisively to revise systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress. However, at the time of the inspection, senior leaders and inspectors agreed that this new

system is not established sufficiently well to be able to reliably measure current or predicted progress of pupils in all year groups. Training and support for middle leaders is taking place to ensure that more accurate assessment information will be gathered more regularly this year to underpin this new monitoring system.

This year, leaders have continued to set targets for many pupils which are based on national average rates of progress. Inspectors saw teachers use these targets, and other information about pupils, to devise learning activities to meet the needs of different groups of pupils in their groups. However, these targets are not ambitious enough. The majority of pupils enter the academy needing to catch up. The progress that they are making typically is not rapid enough to ensure that they meet the standards expected of them by the time they reach the end of Key Stage 4. Only most-able pupils are now being set targets which, if achieved, would enable them to catch up. The targets currently set for lower- and middle-attaining pupils are not sufficiently challenging enough.

Last year, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs made poor progress. Since September, leaders have ensured that the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs are identified and shared with teachers more effectively. While teachers are aware of the identity of disadvantaged pupils within their teaching groups, less work has been done to analyse the learning needs of the individuals within this group. Consequently, learning activities and resources are not always well matched to meet their needs or starting points. The IAB and academy leaders need to take urgent action to prioritise resources to ensure that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special needs make rapid and secure progress.

The Year 7 catch-up funding (for pupils who did not achieve level 4 in reading, mathematics or both at the end of Key Stage 2) is not being used effectively. The academy has used the funding to offer support and interventions to all pupils rather than offer bespoke resources and activities tailored to meet the needs of this group. In addition, there has been no analysis or evaluation of the impact of this strategy on the progress of the pupils eligible for the funding. Leaders need to address this immediately.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Over a third of teachers joined the academy in September 2015, many relatively inexperienced. All teachers the inspectors met are keen to learn how to improve their skills. Academy leaders have identified strengths and weaknesses in teaching, and well-targeted training is provided. Staff benefit from coaching by experienced, subject specialist leaders from BET who visit weekly. The quality of teaching is improving, although some is still not good enough. Leaders show robust responses to teachers who are not improving rapidly. However, the academy finds it difficult to recruit high-quality subject specialist staff to replace those who leave.

Strong relationships between teachers and pupils are promoting better learning. Most pupils show positive attitudes and many participate in lessons enthusiastically. In many lessons, teachers continually check pupils' understanding of key ideas. Where teaching is most effective, teachers then respond by revisiting ideas covered earlier, or by accelerating pupils on to more demanding work to take their learning further. Sometimes, however, teachers do not use assessment information to adjust what pupils do next, but continue with a task which is not always at the right level to extend pupils' thinking. As a result, too much teaching still overemphasises the completion of activities and does not prioritise the quality of pupils' learning. Teachers do not always plan for the needs of individual pupils well enough. This means that least-able pupils are not given sufficient support and the most able are not challenged.

Work in books shows that the quality of writing is improving in English. However, pupils are not always using these skills to explain their thinking clearly in other subjects, including mathematics and science. There are still inconsistencies in the impact of teachers' feedback on raising the standard of pupils' work. Academy leaders are sensibly using good practice in humanities and languages as a model for other subjects. Teachers often work collaboratively across the academy, and teachers were keen to tell inspectors how they had benefited from the support they receive from more experienced colleagues.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour continues to improve. Low-level disruption during lessons is now infrequent but when teaching is less effective some pupils lose concentration and become distracted. Since September, fixed-term exclusions have fallen dramatically. Better use is made of a strengthened system for internal exclusion. Pupils reported a reduction in poor behaviour, including bullying. The atmosphere around the academy at break and lunchtime is pleasant and pupils generally conduct themselves well. In corridors, before lessons begin, a few pupils are a little boisterous and raucous at times but most respond rapidly when staff challenge their behaviour. Not all pupils take pride in their work, due partly to inconsistent expectations across the academy.

Attendance declined during the last academic year. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs was in the lowest 10% nationally. Leaders acted urgently to improve systems for monitoring attendance and have introduced a range of initiatives designed to encourage improved attendance. Currently, while the overall attendance is higher than in the equivalent period last year, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is significantly lower than other pupils' and many disadvantaged pupils are persistent absentees. More work needs to be done to eradicate these differences.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher, academy leaders and IAB members underestimated the scale of the challenge required to bring the academy out of special measures. Following the inspection in July 2014, initial impact was rapid and within a few months behaviour had significantly improved and the academy had stabilised. Staff morale was rising and BET deployed strong practitioners from other trust schools into the academy. Improved classroom management, confident delivery by many teachers, a culture of positivity and favourable assessment of pupils' work led to insufficiently rigorous monitoring during the year. This culture of assumption of success, together with inconsistent information about pupils' progress, noted in previous monitoring visits, contributed to overoptimistic GCSE predictions last year.

Leaders from the trust, members of the IAB and leaders at all levels in the academy are unwavering in their determination to drive improvement and lead the academy out of special measures within this academic year. The significant turnover of staff, while turbulent, has strengthened the overall capacity of the academy to improve rapidly. Recent leadership appointments, including a capable deputy headteacher, are beginning to show positive impact through more effective strategic planning. Leaders have acknowledged the need to check progress more robustly and ensure that they evaluate the impact of actions taken to address weaknesses.

Nevertheless, there is much to do. Plans to establish a governing body are behind schedule. Some governors have been appointed, but they have not yet met to shadow the IAB. In their efforts to be supportive, leaders at all levels do not robustly hold staff to account. As a result, the academy's self-evaluation is overgenerous. Leaders' judgements of teaching tend to be informed by teachers' performance and behaviour management in the classroom rather than their impact on pupils' learning. Although arrangements for keeping pupils safe are secure, some features of safeguarding policy and practice need updating.

The academy development plan outlines many appropriate actions required to raise standards rapidly. However, it lacks success indicators for each year group against which progress can be judged at clear stages. This feedback has been given in previous monitoring inspection reports, but success criteria for evaluating the impact of actions on outcomes are still absent. Currently it is not always clear who will carry out the evaluation or the timescale in which it will be completed. In addition, the role of governors in judging how successfully leaders are improving teaching and raising standards is not clear. The addition of measurable milestones to the development plan are needed to help leaders check the effectiveness of actions, in particular those taken to improve the progress of groups vulnerable to underachievement.

External support

The director of learning for BET is now monitoring pupils' performance information more closely in order to check its reliability. Trust leaders with expertise are providing effective support for teachers, especially those teaching subjects which are not their specialism.