

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



29 January 2016

Mr Gareth Jones
Interim Headteacher
Sandon Business and Enterprise College
Sandon Road
Meir
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST3 7DF

Dear Mr Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sandon Business and Enterprise College

Following my visit with Philip Hamilton, Ofsted Inspector, and Elizabeth Ellis-Martin, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 January 2016, 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 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 taking effective action 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 Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve systems for safeguarding students so that statutory requirements are met, by ensuring that all necessary checks are carried out and documented when recruiting staff.
- Improve the quality of teaching to ensure that students' achievement accelerates, particularly in mathematics and science, by ensuring that teachers:
 - use the information about what students can do to plan lessons that meet their abilities, in particular the most able
 - insist on higher expectations of what students can learn in lessons and over time
 - ask questions in lessons that encourage students to think more deeply about and reflect on their learning
 - mark students' work regularly, providing helpful comments on how to improve
 - consistently and effectively challenge low-level disruption so that the focus is on learning in all lessons.
- Close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and other students nationally by:
 - analysing achievement information across subjects in all years to provide well-planned support where it is needed
 - making sure that the pupil premium funding is effectively allocated and monitored to raise students' achievement.
- Improve the attendance of all groups of students to at least the national average by:
 - developing systems to identify and tackle regular absence
 - monitoring trends of absenteeism
 - evaluating the success of actions taken.
- Improve leadership at all levels, including governance, so that leadership has a greater impact on students' achievement by:
 - evaluating rigorously the quality of teaching throughout the school, using information about students' progress as well as observations and scrutinies of students' work
 - improving teaching where it is needed
 - addressing the key areas for improvement in mathematics and science, which include measurable criteria by which success can be judged
 - analysing more thoroughly other information gathered in the school, such as students' attendance, punctuality, exclusions and behaviour and using this information to target actions in a more focused way that lead to improvement
 - ensuring that students are taught by teachers who have a strong subject knowledge in mathematics

- ensuring that governors receive clear, analytical reports on students' progress and behaviour and the quality of teaching so they can be more effective in challenging and supporting the school.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 January 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and visited parts of lessons, some of which were undertaken jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and other leaders, three groups of pupils, the Chair and one other member of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and two representatives of the local authority.

Context

There have been no changes to staffing since the last monitoring inspection. The conversion to academy status, planned to take place on 1 January 2016, has again been delayed and a new target date of 1 September 2016 has been set. The school has received a record high number of applications for pupil places in Year 7, for September 2016, and the IEB is considering a request from the local authority to raise the school's pupil admission number (PAN) from 180 to 210.

Outcomes for pupils

Recently published and validated GCSE results confirm that the school's headline figure of five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, rose in 2015, placing the school just above the government's floor standards. The proportion of disadvantaged students making at least expected progress rose in both English and mathematics, albeit from a low base previously. As a result, gaps between disadvantaged students and others closed somewhat.

However, the proportion of all students making at least expected progress in English fell from its previous strong position in 2014, which was close to the national average, and the figure for mathematics remained almost identical to the 2014 value, which was well below the national average.

At the last monitoring inspection, teachers' assessments of pupils' current attainment were unreliable and new systems that had just been introduced to make them more reliable were yet to have any impact. This situation has been transformed in the intervening three months. Teachers' assessments are now rigorously checked, externally scrutinised and are accurate. Leaders now have a clear picture of pupils' current attainment and are able to target extra help and support to where it is needed. As a result, pupils' progress is improving.

The school's assessment information for its current Year 11 pupils indicates that outcomes will improve further in 2016, and that gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others will close further. However, the assessment information also indicates that weaknesses will remain in some subjects, including mathematics and science.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching continues to improve across the school so that more of it is now effective in ensuring that pupils make good progress, especially in English, history, religious education and performance. Teachers have increasingly high expectations of their pupils and they carefully plan imaginative and engaging activities that are well matched to what pupils already know and can do. Many teachers carefully check on pupils' learning during lessons and adjust their plans in response to how well pupils are progressing. They also ensure that marking and feedback helps pupils to learn from their mistakes and to improve their future work. Most classrooms have attractive and relevant displays and, together with the teacher's use of interesting resources, this makes for a stimulating environment where pupils are eager to learn.

Some weaker teaching still persists, especially in mathematics and science. This is characterised by poor planning of activities that are neither well matched to pupils' prior knowledge, nor interesting enough to engage pupils in learning. These lessons tend to be dull, with repetitive or mundane activities that do not challenge or interest pupils, and progress is slow or non-existent as a result.

Weaker teaching also tends to be matched with weaker marking and feedback from teachers. When this is the case, marking and feedback do not tell pupils how they can improve their work, and so do not have any impact on accelerating their progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The improving attendance reported in the last inspection report has been maintained and whole-school attendance is now very close to last year's national average for secondary schools. Gaps between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and others remain, but have closed considerably.

Pupils behave well around the site, they are polite, cheerful and courteous to adults and their peers. The school is calm and orderly at the start and end of the day, at break and lunchtime. Some low-level disruption persists in lessons, but is now limited to those lessons that are poorly planned. In these lessons, pupils chat, shout out and drift off-task either because the work is dull or because they do not understand the task they are expected to do.

Most pupils are keen and eager to learn and to do well. Because of the school's focus on 'growth mindsets', and support from teachers, pupils are increasingly able to think about, and talk about, their own learning. Inspectors saw several instances of pupils thoughtfully making mature choices that improved their learning. For example, one pupil who was upset and poised not to take part in a lesson, with some gentle encouragement from his teacher, made the choice to be resilient and to

take part. He then proceeded to engage successfully and make several valuable contributions to the lesson.

Pupils continue to feel safe in school. They say that bullying is very rare and dealt with well by adults. They are also very clear that the academy continues to improve, citing particular improvements in pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching they are receiving.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher continues to provide clear and determined leadership that is appreciated by staff, pupils and parents. He is well supported by an effective senior leadership team who share his commitment to seeing the school improve, and their actions are having an increasing impact on the school. For example, strong leadership has ensured that assessment information is now accurate and reliable and that leaders can use it to identify pupils who are underachieving, and to provide them with extra help to catch up. Equally strong leadership of attendance has seen this area of previous weakness transformed into an emerging strength of the school. Senior leaders' accurate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses in teaching has enabled them to target support to those teachers who need it most; teaching is improving as a consequence.

Faculty and subject leaders are growing in confidence and independence. They still receive considerable support from their link member of the senior leadership team, but are now increasingly leading the development of teaching in their areas. They are making effective use of new assessment, monitoring and evaluation systems and now have greater accountability for the outcomes in their subjects. Inspectors looked specifically at the leadership of special educational needs in the school. There are robust systems alongside effective help and support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

The Interim Executive Board (IEB), that had existed for only a few weeks at the time of the last inspection, has rapidly got on with its job and is now effective. Members of the IEB bring a wealth of expertise to the school, alongside considerable commitment to seeing it improve. They know the school well, including its strengths and weaknesses. They are regularly and robustly challenging leaders, ensuring that they hold them to account for the school's performance.

An effective IEB, a strong headteacher and senior leaders, and increasingly autonomous middle leaders are the key reasons that Sandon continues to improve towards the removal of special measures.

The ongoing saga of academy conversion, with repeated delays and continuing uncertainty, provides an unhelpful distraction for the headteacher and IEB. It is to their credit that it does not appear to have slowed the school's progress, but it has

meant them expending valuable time and energy on issues that are not central to seeing Sandon improve.

External support

The school continues to make effective use of the support provided by Ormiston Sir Stanley Matthews Academy (OSSMA), which the local authority originally commissioned. The Ormiston Academies Trust provides a member of the IEB and an education adviser to support the headteacher; both are valued by the school. Following faculty reviews in December 2015, leaders have also sourced separate support for the mathematics and science faculties, but it is too early to judge its impact.