

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



10 March 2016

Mr James Haseldine
Executive Principal
Waterhead Academy
Huddersfield Road
Oldham
Lancashire
OL4 3NY

Dear Mr Haseldine

Special measures monitoring inspection of Waterhead Academy

Following my visit with Elizabeth Haddock and Fiona Burke Jackson, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 23–24 February 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers, with the exception of mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner, Oldham College Community Academies Trust and the Director of Children's Services for Oldham Local Authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the impact of leadership and management by:
 - making sure that teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are accurate and used effectively to plan pupils' learning appropriately
 - making sure all leaders and governors have accurate data from which they can make decisions that lead to improvements in students' achievement
 - improving the impact middle leaders have on the quality of teaching and on making sure classrooms are orderly.

- Improve students' behaviour, safety and attitudes by:
 - making sure all adults apply the academy's behaviour rules and codes consistently
 - eliminating disruption to learning in lessons
 - combating all types of swearing and homophobic derogatory language
 - further increasing attendance, particularly of disadvantaged students and those who have special educational needs.

- Improve the impact of teaching on students' progress by:
 - developing students' communication skills and their ability to explain clearly their reasoning, thinking and ideas
 - making sure all students are engaged and interested in their work
 - increasing the level of challenge in lessons, particularly for the most-able students.

- Quicken students' progress, with a particular focus on:
 - students who are disadvantaged, so that the attainment gap between them and their peers closes rapidly
 - students who are known to have special educational needs, so that more achieve their potential
 - the most-able students, so that far more attain A* and A grades at GCSE.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 23–24 February 2016

Evidence

Inspectors met with you as executive principal, senior and middle leaders, staff and pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and the chief executive of the sponsor, Oldham College Community Academies Trust. I also spoke with the chief executive officer of the Dean Trust, which is supporting the school.

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of relevant documentation related to the leadership and management of the school, the quality of teaching and learning, pupils' behaviour and outcomes for different pupil groups. Inspectors looked at work in pupils' books during teaching observations. Some of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.

Context

Six members of the teaching staff have left the school since the last monitoring visit and 10 members of staff have joined the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

In the 12 weeks since his appointment, the executive principal has lost no time in making a range of changes that have already begun to make a very positive difference to the school. Among his first actions was the creation of a learning environment that celebrates pupils' successes and gives them a sense of belonging.

The executive principal has swiftly reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team, making strategic changes which contribute to the school's improvement. He has been unafraid to move on staff who do not share the vision of the school's rapid improvement. In contrast, he has been quick to note talented staff, making astute new appointments to refresh the senior and middle leadership teams. They are determined to improve the school, after the momentum of change slowed in summer 2015.

The executive principal has galvanised leaders so that they are tireless in setting up much more robust systems to drive the school's improvement faster. They know exactly what to do in order to secure necessary improvements because they know and understand well the strengths of the school and its areas for development. This is because planning and self-evaluation are forensic, establishing short- and long-term targets at a rapid pace that now keep the school moving forward.

Both the sponsor and governors realised the implications of the decline in progress in the 2015 GCSE examinations and have taken appropriate action to harness high-quality support to build the capacity of the leadership and management of the school. The sponsor has strengthened the governing body through new

appointments. Governors are challenging and supporting school leaders increasingly well through the raising attainment board and various other committees.

All these actions have contributed significantly to putting the school back on track, from a low base last autumn, in its journey towards the removal of special measures.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Senior leaders recognise that the quality of teaching and learning is still too variable across subjects and year groups to lead to good outcomes for pupils. They have responded by putting in place much more stringent arrangements for performance management. They have not shrunk from withholding salary progression where teachers have failed to meet their targets for their pupils' progress. Equally, teachers now benefit from a wide variety of opportunities to see the good practice that exists in the school and in good and outstanding schools elsewhere. Senior leaders can point to formerly underperforming teachers who now teach well, as a result of these opportunities. Middle leaders have been effectively trained to begin to hold their teams to account with confidence, and are doing so.

Pupils respond well when teachers' expectations are high and teaching is engaging. Where teaching is most effective, teachers have strong subject knowledge and insist that pupils know and use accurate subject terminology. Pupils enjoy exploring with their teachers and each other the deep concepts underpinning their subjects, for example in some teaching seen in mathematics. Some teachers are skilled in probing pupils' knowledge and understanding and they make frequent checks on pupils' learning, setting a high level of challenge. This strong teaching also makes an effective contribution to pupils' wider literacy.

Weaknesses, especially in some mathematics teaching and in science, result from a legacy of discontinuity and repetition in learning, because of too many changes in staffing and failure to stretch the most able. This demotivates pupils, who are not able to develop the positive relationships with their teachers that occur when teaching is strong and continuous. This leads to low-level disruption in classes. The school has commissioned a specialist leader to work with the mathematics department in order to ensure that all teaching in mathematics quickly improves.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The majority of pupils who spoke with inspectors, and those parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that pupils feel happy and safe in the school. Pupils generally conduct themselves sensibly in and around the school as a result of effective supervision at breaks, lunchtimes and between lessons. Most pupils are courteous and respectful to each other, their teachers and visiting adults. The behaviour policy is very clear about the consequences of poor behaviour. However, when teachers fail to use the policy consistently, pupils perceive this as

unfair and are slow to respond to their teachers' instructions. Exclusions remain relatively high, because the school is setting high expectations of pupils' personal conduct.

The school has worked hard and successfully to deploy innovative strategies to prepare pupils to learn and behave well at the start of the school day. For example, in the 'red line' morning routine, pupils are greeted individually by their teachers and engaged in conversation, and checks are made to ensure that all are equipped practically and emotionally to work.

Senior leaders have made great strides, in a very short time, in reducing significantly rates of absence including persistent absence, for all groups of pupils across the school. Systems for quickly analysing patterns in attendance and sharing information across pastoral and academic staff are exemplary. The leaders involved take a determined, very 'hands-on' approach with individual pupils and their families, using rewards as well as sanctions in equal measure. The model used to achieve better attendance is worthy of application to other projects. Nevertheless, senior leaders are aware that attendance still needs to improve further.

The appointment of a new special needs coordinator this term and other changes to staffing in the special needs team have resulted in a very closely knit, professional team, well connected to outside agencies and with strong, caring approaches to keep pupils safe. The very low number of pupils who do not move into employment or training after Year 11 is a testament to this high-quality care and to the school's effective careers information, advice and guidance.

Outcomes for pupils

In response to the decline in pupils' attainment and static progress in the 2015 GCSE examinations, senior leaders have set in place a much more robust system for tracking pupils' progress and making accurate and reliable assessments of how well they are learning, especially in Year 11 but in general across the school. They have also made changes to the curriculum, and are planning more, to ensure that all pupils follow worthwhile courses that meet their needs and aspirations.

Current information suggests that, from a low base, pupils now attending the school are on track to make better progress and some attainment and progress gaps are beginning to narrow, including for disadvantaged pupils and some pupils who are of minority ethnic heritage. Despite these improvements, inspectors confirmed senior leaders' view that progress remains too inconsistent across groups of pupils, teachers and subjects.

External support

The chief executive officer of the Dean Trust has provided excellent practical support for the school and for the executive principal. In the 12 weeks since the appointment of the executive principal, their rapid impact on a wide range of aspects of the school's work is evident. The trust has supported the external moderation of pupils' assessment and the quality assurance of the accuracy of pupils' outcomes. The trust has provided opportunities for the continuing professional development of teachers and middle leaders. Their training has caused them to reflect deeply on their own practice and to seek enthusiastically to improve it further. The school has also drawn on support from the Future Leaders Trust, the Teaching Leaders organisation, the Trafford LEAL Service, Oasis Academy and Swinton High School.