

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

Dear Mr Haseldine

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Waterhead Academy**

Following my visit with Dr Osama Abdul Rahim, Ofsted Inspector, and Mr Steven Caldecott, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings. Thank you for the help we received during the inspection and for the time your colleagues made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

This visit was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures in November 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement, which were identified then, 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:

**The academy is not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.**

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

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 Executive Director Health and Wellbeing for Oldham.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which 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' marking is effective and their assessments are accurate and that both are used effectively to plan lessons and to increase pupils' rate of progress
  - making sure all leaders and governors have accurate data from which they can make decisions that lead to improvements in pupils' achievement
  - improving the impact middle leaders have on the quality of teaching and on making sure classrooms are orderly.
  
- Improve pupils' behaviour, safety and attitudes by:
  - making sure that 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 for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs.
  
- Improve the impact of teaching on pupils' progress by:
  - developing pupils' communication skills and their ability to explain clearly their reasoning, thinking and ideas
  - making sure that all pupils are engaged and interested in their work
  - increasing the level of challenge in lessons, particularly for the most-able pupils.
  
- Quicken pupils' progress, with a particular focus on:
  - pupils who are disadvantaged, so that the attainment gap between them and their peers closes rapidly
  - pupils who are known to have special educational needs, so that more achieve their potential
  - the most-able pupils, so that far more attain A\* and A grades at GCSE.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 November 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of subjects and across all year groups. A number of these observations were carried out, jointly, with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the academy's sponsors, a group of subject leaders and groups of pupils of different ages. An inspector also met with the acting special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors visited morning registration, observed one assembly and examined the work in pupils' books to determine the progress pupils are making over time and the quality of marking.

During this inspection, inspectors investigated a number of aspects of the academy's work and, in particular, the following areas:

- the effectiveness of leadership and management in bringing about improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes
- the impact of the steps taken by senior leaders to improve attendance and behaviour.
- how well teachers in the academy are meeting the needs of the most-able pupils and those pupils with special educational needs so that both these groups make at least good progress.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection the Principal of the academy has left and an Executive Principal has been appointed, on a consultancy basis, to boost capacity at senior leadership level. At the time of the inspection he had been in post for eight days. The special educational needs coordinator has left the academy; the governing body has appointed a replacement who will join the staff in January 2016. As a result of staff restructuring, 19 teachers left at the end of the previous academic year and seven new teachers started working at the academy in September 2015. An assistant vice-principal joined the senior leadership team on an internal secondment recently and has been given responsibility for leading the academy's work to improve attendance and behaviour.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Senior leaders' optimism for an improvement in attainment and progress at GCSE in 2015 was misplaced with results remaining more or less at the low levels of 2014. The proportion of pupils who achieved five higher grade GCSEs, including English

and mathematics, declined by two percentage points to 30.5%. Moreover, the proportion of pupils attaining A\* to C grades in English declined by just over 5% and, in science, the proportion of pupils attaining two A\* to C grades declined by just under 13% in comparison to the previous year. Although there were some improvements in the progress that pupils made in English and mathematics, these were marginal and, as a consequence, outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4 were below the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in 2014. The unreliability of teachers' checking of pupils' progress and teachers' low expectations of what pupils can achieve, allied to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, resulted in outcomes that remained stubbornly low. Nevertheless, within this picture of underachievement, there were some signs of improvement. For example, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs who left Waterhead with five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, improved by just over 2% in 2015 when compared to the previous year. Moreover, the two year decline in attainment for disadvantaged pupils was arrested and maintained at the 2014 figure. Furthermore, girls' progress in English and mathematics improved by approximately 12% and 3% respectively. However, these improvements are from a low base. Boys' weak progress in both subjects declined further in 2015.

The academy's performance information for pupils currently in Year 11 indicates that the proportion of pupils attaining five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is 11% higher than the figure for last year. Also, the academy is reporting that pupils' current progress in English is 20% higher than last year, but progress in mathematics remains stubbornly low, showing no improvement. Furthermore, in English, the gap between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and their peers in the academy has grown. However, this performance information needs to be treated with caution as it has not been checked robustly to ensure its reliability and validity.

Evidence from observations of teaching, the work in pupils' books and analysis of assessment information provided by some teachers shows that in a number of subjects, at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, the most-able pupils and pupils of low ability continue to underachieve.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Inconsistencies in the quality of teachers' classroom practice and its impact on pupils' learning, identified at the previous monitoring visit, remain. Teaching has the greatest impact on pupils' progress when teachers plan activities that provide an appropriate degree of challenge for their pupils. These activities make pupils think about the work they have been given to do and, as a result, deepen their understanding. Inspectors observed pupils using the internet effectively to find information about a topic and then use this material to competently prepare a slide show presentation.

As a result of the unreliability of teachers' assessments in too many lessons, teachers' planning does not take enough account of what pupils already know and can do. Consequently, many activities are poorly matched to pupils' needs. A number of teachers adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' approach – resulting in work that is too easy for the most able and too difficult for low-ability pupils. This results in both groups making slow progress. In too many lessons, teachers do not devote enough time to securing pupils' understanding so that they are then able to apply their knowledge in novel situations. This style of teaching is impacting negatively on pupil outcomes at GCSE.

The progress in implementing the new communications strategy has stalled. In a number of the lessons observed, teachers' questioning made too few demands on pupils' thinking. Too often, pupils were required to provide short answers to closed questions. As a result, opportunities for pupils to formulate extended answers and develop their oral skills were missed.

A number of pupils, who spoke with inspectors, said that they did not read for pleasure but only used their reading skills, as required, in the academy. This provides one explanation for the underdeveloped writing skills of some pupils. Moreover, this is having a negative impact on pupils' use of English across the curriculum. This is particularly the case for boys.

As was the case at the previous visit, teachers mark pupils' work regularly. However, the quality of teachers' marking and its consequent impact on pupils' progress remains inconsistent. Where marking is effective, pupils are given an indication of the strengths in their work and what they need to do to make it even better, which pupils then act on. Marking of this quality was seen in English books. However, in a number of subjects, teachers' marking is perfunctory and unhelpful. Consequently, opportunities for pupils to learn from their mistakes are being missed.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Improvements in pupils' behaviour, noted by the inspector at the previous monitoring visit, have been maintained. The proportion of pupils who have received fixed term exclusions is in decline and has been for the past three years. Pupils are well presented and their respect for the academy is evident in buildings and grounds that are litter and graffiti free.

At breaks and lunchtimes, inspectors observed pupils getting on well together and relationships during this free time were cordial and friendly. There is a high staff presence during pupils' periods of recreation and as they move around the academy between lessons. This contributes to a safe and secure environment for pupils during the academy day and ensures that pupils are punctual to lessons.

In upper ability sets, pupils' attitudes to learning are invariably positive even when the teaching is less than inspiring. However, in some middle and lower ability groups when teaching fails to capture the imagination a minority of pupils can become disruptive, disturbing not only their learning but that of their peers. This impacts negatively on the progress of all. In these circumstances, teachers of the affected classes can summon the support of a senior member of staff to help them restore calm so that learning can resume. Nevertheless, the new 'consequences' system to improve behaviour, introduced in September 2015, has been effective in reducing incidents of disruption in lessons. Senior leaders are aware that further work needs to be done to ensure that pupils' attitudes to learning are consistently positive across the academy.

Pupils' rates of attendance are still a cause for concern, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. The academy's attendance target is 95% but the rate of attendance for this term is 4% below this. Rates of attendance across the academy are inconsistent. Older pupils attend less often than their younger peers. Unless rates of attendance improve quickly, the academy's work to improve outcomes and maximise pupils' life chances will be stymied. However, the team of staff responsible for improving attendance has improved the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs. As a result, the gaps between the rates of attendance of these groups and their peers in the academy have closed compared with a similar period last year.

Although the proportion of pupils persistently absent from the academy has declined over the past three years, this proportion is still too high. Senior leaders recognise that their work to reduce persistent absence has yet to have sufficient impact and are seeking support from a neighbouring school with expertise in this area to tackle this priority for improvement.

As a result of senior leaders focusing on improving behaviour, pupils who spoke with inspectors said that incidents of unkind behaviour between pupils and bullying are in decline. Furthermore, the pupils' use of homophobic language is less prevalent.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the current position of the academy. Even though they and their colleagues have worked hard to address the priorities for improvement in the academy's development plan, they realise that the pace of change has not been rapid enough and outcomes for pupils remain too low. The governing body, up until now, has been over reliant on the information provided by senior leaders, particularly in relation to projected outcomes for GCSEs. The unreliability of teachers' assessments of pupils' performance made this information inaccurate. As a result, governors were unaware of any underachievement and, consequently, timely action to address it was not taken. Nevertheless, after the publication of the GCSE results in the summer, they realised

that senior leadership required additional support to help accelerate the pace of change. One outcome was the appointment of the Executive Principal. His role is to bring a fresh perspective to the work of senior leaders and to bring about rapid improvement in pupils' outcomes. Although the Executive Principal has only been in post for a short time, he has gained an understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for development. However, it is still too early to assess the impact of his work on moving the academy forward.

Middle leaders have been supportive of the actions taken by senior staff to bring about improvements. Along with their departmental colleagues, they have had to manage a large number of improvement priorities at the same time. There has been a lack of clarity about which priorities are the most important and which should be done first to have the greatest impact on pupils' achievement. As a result, the progress made has been inconsistent with middle leaders focusing too closely on the completion of tasks and not placing enough emphasis on the impact of their work on pupils' outcomes.

Senior leaders have put systems in place to monitor the work of the academy and hold staff to account for the quality of their work. Where appropriate, they have taken effective action to address underperformance. However, their evaluation of the quality of teaching is over reliant on their observations of classroom practice and not enough weight is given to other sources of evidence such as the scrutiny of work in pupils' books or performance information. As a consequence, they are not making judgements about the quality of teaching over time which would provide a sharper focus for the training programme for teachers.

The achievement of pupils supported by additional or extra funding showed some signs of improvement in 2015 but the governing body realised that the rate of improvement for this group of pupils was not rapid enough. Consequently, they commissioned a further review of how this extra finance could be spent to maximise pupils' progress. Senior leaders have acted positively on the findings; however, it is too early to assess the impact of this work.

### **External support**

Senior leaders have drawn on the support of a number of outside agencies to help them deliver the improvement priorities in the academy development plan. Staff from The Dean Trust have acted in the role of school improvement partners, advising and supporting senior leaders. A consultant from The Dean Trust carried out the recent review of how the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils could be better targeted by governors to improve their outcomes. Moreover, the Executive Principal was commissioned from The Dean Trust to work with senior leaders to accelerate the pace of change.

To help support senior leaders' work to improve pupils' attendance, the academy has made links with a local successful school to learn from their good practice.