

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



22 June 2016

Mr Trevor Swann
Interim Principal
Grindon Hall Christian School
Nookside
Sunderland
SR4 8PG

Dear Mr Swann

Special measures monitoring inspection of Grindon Hall Christian School

Following my visit with Julie McGrane, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 June 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 fifth 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.

This free school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of governors, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality and impact of leaders, managers and governance, including in the sixth form, by:
 - setting more ambitious targets for what pupils can achieve
 - ensuring there is a consistent approach to tracking pupils' achievements across each key stage
 - monitoring the performance of staff more frequently so they are held to account for their work and understand the link between the quality of their teaching, the progress made by pupils and the rewards available through their pay
 - developing the skills of middle leaders so they can take a full and active role in planning, implementing and evaluating improvements to pupils' progress
 - implementing a broad and balanced approach to the curriculum that exploits all opportunities, including assemblies and form time, to teach pupils about the fundamental British values they will need to live in modern Britain
 - make sure recruitment procedures are fair, open and transparent; secure the very best people for the job and ensure good value for money
 - ensuring the outcomes of the pupil premium and governance reviews are implemented rapidly so that there is appropriate and effective oversight of the school's work.

- Ensure all pupils feel and are kept safe and are well-prepared for life in modern Britain by:
 - ensuring all staff comply with the requirements of the school's health and safety policy
 - analysing incidents of poor behaviour and bullying so that the root cause of this conduct is understood, acted upon quickly and leads to a reduction in the number of exclusions and repeated incidents
 - implementing an effective programme of personal development, including sex and relationships education, so that pupils have a forum to raise issues, discuss the risks to which they may be exposed and feel better prepared to make important decisions in later life
 - raising pupils' awareness of equality and diversity in Britain today so that they are respectful and tolerant to those who belong to different faiths, cultures and communities.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and enables all pupils, especially those who are most able, to be challenged in their learning and reach their full potential, by:
 - ensuring teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - planning lessons that take account of what pupils already know and can do so that they are fully challenged in their learning, interested in their work and

- willing to respond to teachers' questions
- providing enough time for pupils to reflect and respond to questions, ensuring teachers take account of pupils' responses to adapt the lesson where necessary and address any misunderstandings
 - sharing the best aspects of marking and feedback in the primary phase across the wider school, ensuring there is enough time for pupils to respond to teachers' comments
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to write at length and solve mathematical problems in a range of subjects and contexts
 - ensuring children in the early years have greater opportunity to develop their learning through a range of activities they can choose for themselves, including in the outdoor environment
 - ensuring those pupils resitting their GCSEs in the sixth form are adequately supported to achieve a better grade.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 7 June 2016 to 8 June 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They also met with the interim principal, the two vice-principals, middle leaders, individual and groups of parents and members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. They observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons across the school. Four of these observations were carried out with senior leaders. As well as speaking with pupils in lessons and during social times, inspectors spoke more formally with a group of Year 4 pupils and with a group of Year 10 pupils about their work and experience of school. They also scrutinised a range of pupils' work in books and folders. Further observations were carried out at breaks, lunchtimes and after school. The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the Bright Tribe Academy Trust, the potential sponsor, on the telephone. He also took into account 41 views expressed by parents through the online Parent View website.

Context

The school is continuing to explore sponsored academy status with the Bright Tribe Academy Trust.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

- The interim principal continues to have a positive impact on the school. High expectations and a fuller involvement of staff are leading to improvements in the quality of teaching. Staff and pupils are responding enthusiastically to the principal's clear vision for the school.
- The interim principal has effectively used the insights that have stemmed from his monitoring of teachers' performance and the consequent 'one to one' conversations with staff about their work and aspirations referred to in February 2016's report. Working with senior and middle leaders, he has identified key areas for improvement and is encouraging an approach to improving the school that involves all staff. This is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching.
- The leadership of the primary school is increasingly effective. The vice-principal has moved swiftly to improve the physical environment. The newly established library is having a positive impact on pupils' reading skills and habits. The enhanced outside area has given children and pupils more attractive spaces in which to learn and play. These environmental changes and the sharing of good practice among staff are having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.
- The formal tracking of pupils' progress across each key stage is not regular enough. Nor is there sufficient analysis by senior leaders of information to identify those pupils who need urgent support. This hampers the staff's ability to focus their teaching on pupils' particular needs so that they make sustained progress.

- The leadership of the provision for pupils with special educational needs or disability is developing strongly. The support given to individual and groups of staff by the leader of this aspect of the school's work is increasingly detailed and helpful. As a result, staff are more able to support these pupils through their work in lessons rather than relying on provision that takes place outside the classroom. However, inspection evidence shows that a small number of staff are still not taking sufficient account of the needs of this group of pupils in their teaching.
- Middle leaders are now more able to initiate and contribute to whole-school actions. For example, as well as leading their subject areas, middle leaders are now leading groups of staff who work across different subject areas. These groups focus on specific areas, such as the most able, and share insights and expertise to improve teaching. Early indications are that this focused, shared approach is having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Governors are becoming more effective. The interim principal and other senior leaders provide them with information that helps them to have clearer insights into what needs to be done. Inspection evidence shows that this more direct approach continues to have a positive impact. Governors have been distracted by the slow pace and complexity of the discussions associated with becoming an academy. However, more recently, as a result of resolute leadership and the input of the interim principal, they have become more diligent in their focus on improving the school's performance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

- There is still too much variability in the quality of teaching across the school. Some teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve have still not improved sufficiently. Where teachers' expectations are better, pupils learn and behave well.
- Some teachers are still not using the increasingly detailed information about the pupils they teach to target their teaching on how much challenge the pupils need. This can result in some pupils not making the progress that they should because the work they are being given does not stretch them.
- Inspection evidence shows that when teachers use focused, challenging questioning it extends and deepens pupils' learning. For example, in a Year 9 religious education lesson the teacher asked pupils challenging questions about the nature of God. She followed up their answers with supplementary questions to test and develop their thinking. The pupils then used this approach to questioning and probing for detail in the ensuing small-group work where they questioned each other about their views.
- There is still an over-reliance on worksheets across the school. This is particularly the case in the primary years. It is restricting the opportunities that pupils have to extend and develop their writing skills. In the secondary phase this heavy dependence also slows progress, particularly that of the most able pupils. This is because too much time is spent copying out work from sheets rather than

developing independent thinking and exploring increasingly complex ideas.

- The learning environment in the primary phase continues to be strong. There are striking displays and examples of pupils' writing and art. Pupils take pride in their work. By contrast, although much improved, particularly in science, the secondary environment is still too often messy and the displays tired.
- Not all teachers follow the school's own marking and assessment policy. As a result, opportunities are lost to develop and extend pupils' learning. This is because pupils are, too often, not clear about what they have to do in response to teachers' comments. Where pupils are clear about what they need to do next, they make rapid progress.
- In the pupils' work books seen during the inspection, there were too many examples of poor presentation and, where this was the case, not all staff drew pupils' attention to it. There is an apparent inconsistency in what different teachers expect and accept.
- Children in the early years choose activities that interest them and develop their learning. However, there are insufficient opportunities to extend children's confidence with manipulating and understanding numbers in the outside area. Staff record children's progress to inform their next steps in learning but there are still gaps in the 'learning journals'. As a result, these valuable records are not as detailed and as useful as they could be in mapping children's progress and identifying areas where children's learning could be developed further.
- Pupils enjoy reading and can talk fluently about what they have read and what they like. The newly established library in the primary area is attractive and is a focus for the renewed emphasis on reading brought about by leaders. In the secondary phase, although pupils talk animatedly about reading and there are regular opportunities to read in school, there is no readily accessible library provision. Also, in key stage 3 it was observed that pupils who had failed to bring a book to the regular reading time were given a book, apparently at random. When asked about this, pupils said that it was a common occurrence.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

- The school's actions to keep pupils safe are effective.
- Leaders ensure that there is a culture where there is a strong emphasis on safeguarding at the school. The safeguarding systems and procedures continue to be effective and are rigorously monitored. Pupils are carefully and effectively supervised before and after school and during breaktimes. Pupils report that they welcome this. They know that the staff are there to look after them.
- Generally, pupils are well behaved and alert to the needs of others. However, during the inspection examples were seen of boisterous behaviour at breaktimes. These were quickly dealt with by attentive staff. Also, examples of low-level disruption were seen in lessons. This was particularly the case when the pace of learning slowed as a result of uninspiring teaching.
- All of the pupils spoken with said that they felt safe. They said that bullying is

rare. If it were to occur they said that they were confident that it would be dealt with promptly and effectively by staff. The school uses a range of effective strategies to ensure that pupils are regularly updated and encouraged to stay safe, including when online. As well as sessions during tutor time and in assembly, there are helpful and informative displays around the school and regular visits from outside speakers. Pupils report that they enjoy and value these.

- Attendance for all groups of pupils at the school continues to improve and is at or above national averages. Information about patterns of absence for individual and groups of pupils is now carefully and regularly analysed. Insights gained from this analysis are quickly acted on and pupils and families for whom, from time to time, attendance and punctuality are challenges are given appropriate support.
- The school's procedures for the appointment of staff continue to be effective. Staff files and related information are well kept and scrupulously monitored.
- Parents spoken with during the inspection say that they are very content with the school and that their children are happy and well cared for. The comments on the Ofsted online survey of parents, Parent View, are overwhelmingly positive.

Outcomes for pupils

- Most children enter Reception with levels of development that are typical or above those expected for their age. Although they make progress, evidence from this visit shows that the progress is not as swift as it was at the time of previous inspection. Opportunities are lost, especially in the outdoor area, to develop children's skills with numbers.
- Results of checks of Year 1 pupils' ability to recognise letters and sounds (phonics) were above national expectations. February 2016's inspection showed that staff were predicting a significant 'dip' in this summer's performance in these checks. However, actions taken since that time have resulted in a more positive view of how pupils will achieve and staff are now predicting only a slight dip.
- Outcomes in mathematics in the primary phase are improving. Where improvement is strongest pupils are given more opportunities to engage with open-ended mathematical problems. These enable them to explore a range of approaches to solve problems. However, leaders acknowledge that more still needs to be done to widen and deepen pupils' experience of mathematics.
- The newly established library in the primary phase has helped to raise the profile of reading. This has combined with a closer emphasis on reading for a range of purposes in classrooms and a series of whole-school reading events. Together, these actions have helped improve pupils' skills, engagement and love of reading.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils in each year of the primary phase is small. As reported in the February 2016 inspection, in key stage 1, where numbers are very small, all disadvantaged pupils achieved national standards in reading, writing and mathematics in the summer 2015 tests. In key stage 2, all disadvantaged pupils achieved national expectations in reading but were below

what is expected nationally in writing and mathematics. Evidence from this inspection suggests that the new leadership arrangements are having a positive impact on these pupils' outcomes in these subject areas. This is because leaders are ensuring that all staff, including teaching assistants, are increasingly clear about what they need to do to ensure that these pupils succeed.

- Writing is still a key area for improvement across the primary phase of the school. There are clear signs that, under the decisive leadership of the vice-principal, the quality of writing is improving. However, evidence from this inspection still shows some lack of breadth and depth in the opportunities pupils have to write. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils. Worksheets and over-structured, simplistic approaches are limiting pupils' outcomes in this vital area of their learning.
- As reported in February 2016, there have been no further GCSE results. Leaders are confident of an improvement in GCSE results in summer 2016. Inspection evidence shows that staff at the school are very diligent in preparing pupils for these vital examinations. As well as work in lesson times and carefully structured home study, a variety of after-school and extra teaching is offered by a wide range of staff to help pupils and learners prepare for their examinations.
- Outcomes in the sixth form continue to be strong. A good set of results is predicted for the summer of 2016. Learners report that they enjoy their time in the sixth form and that the quality of teaching and teachers' engagement and support for them is high. Learners appreciate the extra support and focused effort that staff put in to help them. Learners are well prepared for their next steps in education, work or training.
- The school's own termly checks of progress continue to show that pupils with special educational needs or disability make good or better progress when compared with their peers. Inspection evidence supports this. However, examples were still seen where a few teachers were not sufficiently and precisely aware enough of these pupils' needs and how they should be addressed. More still needs to be done to ensure that staff take fuller account of the increasingly detailed information about these pupils.

External support

- The school is receiving effective support from the Prince Bishop's Teaching School Alliance. This support has focused on supporting leaders and improving the quality of teaching and the accuracy of assessment.
- The school is receiving effective support from Sunderland local authority. Officers of the authority are helping the school ratify their assessments of how well pupils are doing through regular moderation processes.
- The school is also receiving effective support from the Bright Tribe Academy Trust. Bright Tribe is supporting the school with leadership, developing the post-16 curriculum, monitoring the provision for pupils with special educational needs or disability and financial and staffing matters.