

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



8 July 2016

Mr D Edwards
Acting Principal
CUL Academy Trust
69 Aston Road North
Aston
Birmingham
West Midlands
B6 4EA

Dear Mr Edwards

Special measures monitoring inspection of CUL academy

Following my visit to your school on 15 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 2015. 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

It is strongly recommended that the school does not appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2015.

- As a matter of urgency, leaders, managers and governors must put right the weaknesses in the academy's safeguarding procedures. They should:
 - make sure that a disclosure and barring service check is carried out for everyone who does not already have one, including temporary staff and members of the governing body, and that the required information is recorded on the academy's single central record
 - amend the policy for safer recruitment to include the following requirements: every interview panel must include one person who has been trained in safer recruitment; the names of all members of the interview panel are recorded; and any person on an interview panel may not supply a reference for any applicant for the post in question
 - make sure that those members of staff who have not completed training in the use of restraint do so as soon as possible
 - make sure that instances of the use of restraint are recorded in a bound book with numbered pages.

- Strengthen the impact that leadership, management and governance have on all aspects of the academy's work by:
 - making sure that all of the policies and other documents that guide the academy's work are based on accurate information that is specific to the academy, and that governors discuss and agree their content before they are published
 - analysing information about students' attainment, their personal development and the quality of teaching
 - presenting the information to governors so that they can hold leaders to account and decide, with senior leaders, where improvements are needed
 - amending the academy's improvement plan to include these priorities
 - checking that targets for improvement are challenging yet attainable
 - making sure that self-evaluation is accurate and based on robust evidence
 - reviewing the roles and responsibilities of staff, in particular those of senior leaders, to make sure that workloads are manageable
 - recruiting additional governors with suitable experience and the expertise to help drive the academy forwards
 - making sure that the website includes the information specified in the academy's funding agreement.

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that students' progress improves by:
 - developing teachers' accuracy in assessing the levels students are working at and in making predictions about the grades they are likely to reach in external

examinations, for example by checking their assessments with teachers at other schools

- making sure that all lessons start promptly
- insisting that teachers check that students are reading with understanding when they are reading by themselves
- increasing the quantity and range of reading materials available to students.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 15 June 2016

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting principal and teachers. A telephone conversation was held with the chair of the governing body. The inspector spent time in lessons, where she spoke to pupils and looked at their work.

Context

The principal has been absent from the school due to ill health since early May. The vice-principal is acting as principal. Since the previous inspection two teachers (including one senior leader) and two members of support staff have left the school. Two support staff and two temporary teachers have joined.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

As the only senior leader in school, the acting principal is doing a sterling job of keeping the school running on a day-to-day basis. However, in the current circumstances, this is a very difficult task and the school has not been able to move forward in most aspects of its work since the previous inspection.

The principal is absent due to ill health and the third senior leader, who was also a designated safeguarding lead, has left. There has been a high amount of staff absence, including absent support staff. Over the course of the last two terms several teachers have left and there are now only two substantive teachers in post. The number of mentors, who provide pastoral support to pupils, has decreased. The acting principal's time has therefore been mainly taken up by dealing with staffing issues, complicated safeguarding issues and issues related to behaviour. He has done all of this very well.

The substantive teachers and the new temporary staff are working well together to help to make sure that pupils receive good-quality teaching and to minimise the potential impact on their examination outcomes. Support staff are working as a team to make sure that the school continues to function.

When several subject teachers left recently, leaders discovered serious gaps in the volume and quality of examination coursework, and in pupils' books. Physical education practical coursework had not been recorded properly and English and some art coursework was missing. This exposes long-standing weaknesses in leaders' systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. It also calls into question the accuracy of some of the assessment information that has been submitted to the assessment leader by former staff. Valuable support has

been received from another local school to get Year 11 coursework up to date, marked and submitted.

The recording of safeguarding incidents has improved. A scrutiny of the recording system showed that incidents are being recorded in a more detailed and timely manner. It is easier to see what action has been taken, which in turn makes it easier for leaders to keep a clear overview. Good examples were given of how complicated cases have been dealt with thoroughly.

Some errors have been made in the way that the single central record is kept. Checks of new staff's suitability to work with children have been carried out appropriately, but information is not always recorded or kept properly.

In addition, the following required actions have not been taken since the previous inspection.

- The school still does not have a functioning website.
- The physical intervention policy has not been rewritten.
- There is no staff training plan for safeguarding.
- There has been no further work to define how the school's action plan will be monitored and evaluated.

The governing body is still very small, which restricts its capacity to give the school the amount of support that is currently needed. The chair of governors has managed to find two new governors with appropriate skills to join the board, and is awaiting confirmation of the appropriate checks on their suitability. The governing body has supported the principal well in dealing with safeguarding issues and has begun to take steps to remedy the current lack of expertise in teaching and learning at a senior level.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

A scrutiny of English books showed that while there was some good-quality work in some books, there was too little of it given the number of English lessons pupils have had over the course of this academic year. Other books contained only scrappy or incomplete work. However, many pupils show an interest in English, and demonstrate some reasonable knowledge, which the new English teacher is building on well. It has been identified that there are not enough good-quality resources to support English teaching. Governors are supporting the purchase of new materials.

In contrast, science books show steady progression through the topics being taught, careful and often well-presented work, and many good responses from pupils. Pupils know the structure of lessons, and most respond well to having to answer a short examination question after studying a topic in a lesson. In a mathematics lesson visited during the inspection, the teacher persisted until pupils at different levels

overcame their lack of confidence in the subject and quickly realised that they could understand ratios.

Each lesson is an hour long. While this works for some pupils and some subjects, for many pupils this is a long time to concentrate. Teachers tend to find that pupils do not always manage to give their best for the whole hour. The school plans to review this ready for September.

The school has retested pupils to gain a more accurate reading level for each of them. Some new books have been bought and there is a commitment from the governing body to buying more as soon as possible.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils, particularly those who are sitting examinations, have become frustrated by the impact the staffing situation has had on their learning. This has led to more incidents of challenging or uncooperative behaviour than has previously been the norm. Some Year 11 pupils are resentful that they are still rightly required to be in school in between examinations. However, pupils are now mainly fairly settled. During the inspection behaviour was largely calm and sensible. Pupils were mostly polite to staff and to the inspector, and were happy to talk about their experiences of school. Pupils worked reasonably well in their lessons.

There has been some slippage in the previously high standards of pupils' personal presentation. While many pupils were in full uniform, others were not, and a few were choosing to flout rules about jewellery and shoes. Staff had not made sure that all pupils were properly presented before going into school in the morning, which is the usual expectation.

Attendance for the year to date is 79%, similar to that reported at the time of the previous inspection. Many pupils attend well, but others have very low attendance. The school continues to tackle low attendance systematically. Punctuality is an ongoing issue for some pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Year 11 pupils have attended for and sat almost all their examinations. Staff managed to get them back on an even keel after their upset about staff changes and missing coursework, and successfully communicated to them how important the examinations are.

The school continues to be confident that, despite the disruption, GCSE outcomes will be positive. Most pupils are predicted to attain five GCSEs or equivalent at grades A* to G, with almost half being predicted to gain five at grades A* to C.

In other year groups, pupils who attend regularly are making steady progress in mathematics and science. Gaps in pupils' English work suggest that progress is not as good as it should be in English.

External support

The school has sought and received support from Aston Manor School to assist with coursework. CUL Academy teachers are also meeting with teachers from Aston Manor to ensure that they are up to date with curriculum and assessment changes. The school is working well with consultants from Achievement for All.

Priority for further improvement

In addition to remedying the issues explained above, as a matter of urgency governors need to secure support for the school at a senior leadership level to ensure that there is no further deterioration and that the school moves forward as necessary.