

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



5 December 2016

Mr Grant Mottram
Headteacher
Abbey Woods Academy
Wimblestraw Road
Berinsfield
Wallingford
Oxfordshire
OX10 7LZ

Dear Mr Mottram

Special measures monitoring inspection of Abbey Woods Academy

Following my visit to your school on 2 and 3 November 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 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.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements for keeping pupils safe by:
 - collating and maintaining clearance details for all members of staff on a single central record
 - addressing the difficulties around the safety of the site
 - maintaining vigilance to make sure that those areas which are not safe for pupils are not accessible to them.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good in order to accelerate pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers' assessment of pupils' current achievement is accurate from the point of entry to the academy so that they provide work which will stretch all groups of pupils, including the most able
 - teachers develop more skilful use of questioning during lessons so that they can move pupils on or support them further
 - all staff develop high expectations and aspirations for all pupils and increase the opportunities for deepening their understanding across all the subjects studied
 - disadvantaged pupils and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs are identified by all teachers, and supported and stretched with work at appropriate levels of challenge, including in the early years
 - work set to develop the technical understanding of English spelling, punctuation and grammar enables pupils to attain higher standards in writing, in all year groups
 - all pupils are motivated to work hard and to take pride in the presentation in their workbooks
 - the behaviour of pupils is managed effectively and consistently so that it does not disrupt their learning and that of others.
- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels, the Trust and governors by ensuring that:
 - the Trust board and governors develop systems to provide them with an accurate view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses and hold leaders to account for bringing about improvement
 - finances and resources to support disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are allocated and monitored effectively
 - the recently forged partnership between the interim headteacher, Trust primary lead, and trust learning and teaching coach is further strengthened to accelerate pupils' progress

- subject leaders have appropriate training to improve the quality of teaching in their areas and are held accountable for pupil progress in their subject.
- Improve outcomes for children in the early years by:
 - ensuring the accuracy of teachers' assessments so that appropriate activities are planned for all children
 - ensuring that activities in all lessons stretch pupils of all abilities including the most able and children who are disabled or who have special educational needs.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of the work of the academy can be improved.

An external review of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of the work of the academy can be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 November 2016

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, executive headteacher, other school leaders, staff, pupils, governors that form the rapid improvement board and representatives from the academy trust. The inspector visited all classes to observe in lessons, review pupils' work and discuss their learning with them. All of these visits were carried out jointly with a range of school leaders.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, the executive headteacher's direct involvement in the leadership of the school has reduced to a predominantly consultative role. In terms of time allocation, her support has decreased to one day per week since the start of the autumn term. At the time of the monitoring visit, the chair of the rapid improvement board of governors was due to step down imminently to be replaced by the vice-chair. This is a planned change by the trust; the outgoing chair, also the regional director for the multi-academy trust, plans to continue direct involvement with school leaders in an increased challenge and support role. A new deputy headteacher started in September 2016. She will also be the school's special educational needs coordinator and is currently working alongside the interim postholder for a term to support transition. The previous disruption caused by frequent changes of temporary teachers has been resolved. The teaching team is now formed entirely of teachers in substantive posts. Last year, many pupils were taught in mixed-age classes. Pupils are now all taught in classes with other pupils the same age.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders are not securing improvements quickly enough. Hindered by previous long-term difficulties with recruitment, leaders admit frankly that they have fallen behind the necessary timescales for special measures to be removed. Leaders are honest about remaining weaknesses. However, they have not focused relentlessly and sharply enough on where they still need to get to, as opposed to where they have come from.

Not all improvements to safeguarding procedures have been maintained. New staff are yet to be trained in the school's own policies and procedures as outlined in the school's induction handbook. Completing this training is now urgently overdue. New staff have been subject to thorough checks on their suitability. The security of the early years outdoor area has been further enhanced since the previous monitoring visit and procedures for checking that children are all present have been tightened.

Improvements to the leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remain at an early stage of development. The interim and new special educational needs coordinators are working in partnership to ensure that pupils' particular needs are now properly identified and understood. This has led correctly to changes in the pupils who are identified as having special educational needs. Pupils who have special educational needs now receive extra help in addition to their daily lessons. However, only partway through the first cycle of this support, it is too soon to see the impact on pupils' progress. Leaders are alert to the fact that sessions may not be sufficiently bespoke to address the particular next steps that will really accelerate pupils' progress.

Leaders and staff have sustained the positive climate and atmosphere across the school noted at the previous monitoring visit. Leaders have now secured substantive appointments of a full teaching team and a deputy headteacher. These changes are yet to bear fruit. Those responsible for leading particular subjects or aspects of the school's work have a clear and accurate view of what is going well and what remains to be done. However, in prioritising their own teaching commitments, their capacity to check that improvements are fully implemented and sustained in other classes is restricted.

Systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress are now more fully established. This has exposed starkly the significant shortfalls that many pupils across the school still have compared with expectations for their age. Provisional results show that the performance of the Year 6 leavers in the summer, though expected to have been significantly limited by a previous legacy of weak teaching, was worse than leaders and teachers had originally hoped.

Leadership capacity of the early years provision is limited. The experienced early years leader from another school in the trust is currently allocated half-a-day per fortnight. Although commendably, given this amount of leadership time, there are evident improvements, fundamental aspects are not secure. For example, despite reminders from the local authority adviser, leaders have not finalised checks that all safeguarding and welfare requirements are met. The environment and its use is improving. When children are given opportunities to learn through play, activities mostly sustain their attention. However, the range of opportunities for children to develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills, both inside and out, is narrow.

The rapid improvement board has not been rigorous enough in their challenge and support of school leaders to ensure that improvements are sufficiently quick and sustained. Leaders continue to plan appropriate and systematic actions to tackle weaknesses. However, the timescales on current plans do not reflect the urgency of the improvements that are still required, or take enough account of what should be achievable with increased leadership capacity and a more stable team.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving, but too slowly. Teachers are not maximising the benefits of pupils' improved attitudes by raising academic expectations high enough. Teachers spend too much time consolidating and cementing what the majority of pupils already know and can do, rather than moving on more quickly to new learning. Consequently, pupils are not catching up quickly enough with other pupils nationally.

Pupils' improving progress in writing, noted at the previous monitoring visit, has stalled. This is because pupils have not had enough opportunities this academic year to apply their skills to extended pieces of writing. Teachers are beginning to take a more systematic approach to the explicit teaching of English, grammar, punctuation and spelling. This means that pupils are increasingly successful when completing these tasks, for example using speech marks correctly or organising their writing into paragraphs.

The teaching of mathematics is inconsistent. In some classes, pupils explore how to use the mathematics that they learn in different contexts, but this is not consistent across the school. In other classes, pupils simply repeat very similar calculations without additional challenge. However, teachers are using a broad range of equipment and practical apparatus to help pupils understand key concepts in mathematics.

Teaching assistants are mostly usefully deployed and well briefed. In the lessons observed, pupils responded well to their requests and instructions. A number of teachers use questioning well to check pupils' understanding or prompt them to explain their answers. However, often adults do not probe pupils' thinking deeply enough, including that of the most able pupils.

Teaching typically engages and interests pupils. Pupils now demonstrate positive attitudes and more desire to do well. Teachers are raising expectations of the quality of pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work, setting out clear expectations and valuing what pupils produce. Although still slightly variable, the quality of pupils' presentation is improving in most classes. Pupils take more pride in their work, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

In the Nursery, adults interact well with children, promoting good language development. Effective questioning and prompting from adults introduced new opportunities for children to count and solve problems as they played. The additional challenge that this sort of interaction provides for children is much less evident in Reception Year. Although additional challenge through self-chosen activities is planned, in practice this does not meet the needs of children consistently well.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders and staff have sustained improvements to pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Pupils behave well and mostly remain attentive in lessons. Pupils are polite and friendly, showing respect to each other, staff and visitors.

Pupils are focused and sometimes enthused by their learning. In discussion, they have positive attitudes to school and lessons. They realise the importance of doing their best and they are keen to improve. Pupils think mostly that their work is getting better, although some believe rightly that they are capable of even more. Children in the early years are settling well and participating with interest in the activities on offer. In Nursery, although some children still struggle, shared activities are helping them to learn how to play with others and take turns.

Pupils report that they feel safe. They are confident that they can approach adults in the school who will listen properly to any concerns. Pupils say that adults resolve any issues successfully and have particular confidence in the headteacher's actions. They believe that any bullying is rare and well dealt with.

School figures for the previous academic year show that overall, pupils did not attend school regularly enough. There was some improvement in the attendance of those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. So far in the current year, there is a marked and much-needed improvement in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, bringing it closer to the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' progress remains too slow. Work in pupils' books so far this year shows that in too many cases pupils are not making enough progress to begin to catch up with age-related expectations. The work of pupils that are already working close to the expected standard tends to show better progress, although very few most-able pupils exceed expectations across the school. Progress for pupils struggling to catch up is still sometimes limited. Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to others in school, which is not enough to diminish the difference compared with other pupils nationally.

Provisional results show that Year 6 leavers in 2016 made broadly average progress across key stage 2 in reading and mathematics. However, progress in writing was significantly below average. Pupils had not made up enough of the substantial ground that they had lost as a result of previously inadequate teaching. Consequently, no pupils reached age-related expectations in all of reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders' actions to improve phonics have had mixed success. Phonics teaching is now more systematic and structured. However, although there was an improvement in the results of the Year 1 screening check in 2016, disruptions caused by frequent

changes of teachers contributed to figures remaining some way below the national average. Conversely, stronger and more consistent teaching brought the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in Year 2 in line with the national average. However, like other teaching, phonics teaching observed during this monitoring visit spent too much time going over previous learning, rather than introducing new sounds, or giving pupils opportunities to apply their knowledge to read or write.

External support

The trust has not provided the necessary challenge and support to school leaders to keep improvements on track. Identifying the need for closer and more intensive oversight and scrutiny to accelerate the rate and consistency of improvement, the trust has recently begun to take steps to free up their capacity to provide this. The local authority continues to provide useful feedback to improve the quality of the early years provision. However, limited leadership capacity for leading the early years means that this advice is still not acted on in a timely manner.