

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



21 April 2017

Mr James Hughes
Headteacher
The E-Act Burnham Park Academy
Opendale Road
Burnham
Slough
Buckinghamshire
SL1 7LZ

Dear Mr Hughes

Special measures monitoring inspection of The E-Act Burnham Park Academy

Following my visit to your school on 30 March 2017, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in July 2016.

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.

The school's improvement plan and statement of action are fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers. However, I advise that they are appointed to faculties where leadership is strongest.

I am copying this letter to the regional education director for E-Act, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Buckinghamshire.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2016

Increase the effectiveness of leadership across the school by:

- evaluating the impact of current actions and refining them so that they focus on what will make the most rapid improvements to the school
- Ensuring that leaders' areas of responsibility are clear, so that they can be held increasingly to account.

Embed and develop recent actions to improve behaviour and attendance, so that more pupils attend school regularly and exclusions are reduced.

Improve the consistency of high-quality teaching across the school, so that it leads to improved outcomes for all groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged, by:

- ensuring that teachers' expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour are consistently high across the school
- Making sure that teachers use information about prior learning to plan work that more closely meets pupils' individual starting points.

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

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 30 March 2017

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised documents relating to pupils' progress and their safety, along with the school's own monitoring and evaluation of its improvement. The inspector met with principal, the executive principal, the senior leadership team, a group of pupils from Years 7 to 11, and with members of the E-Act's regional education team, which holds the school to account. The inspector made short visits to classrooms, accompanied by the principal, to observe learning. A number of short visits were also made to observe behaviour. The inspector scrutinised pupils' books. A telephone call was made to the local authority's designated officer and to one of the national directors of education for the E-Act academy chain.

Context

Since the last inspection a new headteacher has been appointed. The E-Act trust's regional education director is now also the executive principal and is based full-time in the school. Changes in governance are now fully in place, with a regional educational team (RET) overseeing the school's improvements and an academy ambassadorial advisory body working closely with parents and the local community. The leadership team has been restructured and a significant number of new staff joined the school in September 2016.

There are now only a handful of students in Year 13 and none in Year 12. The post-16 provision will close at the end of this academic year.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and executive principal are highly visible around the school, working in a direct and robust way with pupils and staff to establish a better ethos. They work very effectively in tandem, ensuring that staff, parents and pupils are crystal clear about their vision for the school and how they plan to achieve it. They have shown great openness and honesty by fully taking on board parents' and pupils' concerns. System leaders, who also have a governance role, as part of the RET, have made a positive contribution to improvements. However, they have not made as much progress in monitoring the implementation of emerging recommendations from the review of pupil premium.

The new headteacher and executive principal have systematically and determinedly made changes that are leading to improvements. They have placed pupils' welfare and sense of belonging, as well as improving the overall culture of the school, at the forefront of their work. This approach has led to improvements across the school. The most significant improvements have been to pupils' conduct both in lessons and

around the school. Other improvements are less consistent but leaders have strong plans in place to ensure that they are fully bedded in across subjects and classes. Of note, are the effective changes leaders are making to the curriculum, so it better meets the needs of different groups of pupils, including designing a special curriculum to re-engage pupils who have potential but are disaffected. In addition, leaders have successfully adapted the Year 7 curriculum, so it helps pupils who join the school with lower than average attainment to catch up.

Strengths in the school's approach to securing improvement

Leaders make good use of the school's detailed action plan and longer statement of action. Both plans have priorities that are very closely linked to the areas for improvement from the previous inspection report. The action plan supports leaders in moving the school forward swiftly because each area for improvement has been thoughtfully broken down into detailed individual actions, each of which is clearly allocated to a senior leader.

The plan also successfully guides leaders to the evidence they need to gather to prove that planned actions have been completed. The plan helpfully includes the intended impact of planned actions on pupils' behaviour and outcomes. However, not enough focus is placed on how the RET will follow up on actions that are rated as incomplete or ineffectual.

Leaders rigorously check the plan and then update it to show whether planned actions have been effective. They make good use of the success criteria provided to ensure that their updates paint a true picture of the school's progress. The plan indicates that the majority of actions planned to date have been successful.

Senior leaders have worked tirelessly to gain the respect of staff, pupils and parents. Staff and pupils are united in their praise of this aspect of leadership. In most classes, there is a good and purposeful atmosphere and pupils told inspectors that this makes a huge difference to their concentration, being able to develop their skills and their motivation to learn more.

Leaders apply high standards and scrutinise a wide range of evidence when judging the quality of teaching and behaviour. In keeping with their focus on developing the positive culture in the school, leaders seek pupils' views when conducting evaluations.

Leaders' actions to improve teaching are mostly effective. They closely monitor Year 11 pupils to ensure they are making the rapid progress they need to catch up. Leaders swiftly identify any pupils who are not making strong enough progress and provide carefully planned extra help. In addition, leaders ensure that any teaching that does not meet their high standards, improves, following a combination of extensive support and rigorous monitoring. As a consequence, a number of teachers have rapidly improved their practice.

Additionally, leaders are making good use of links with other academies in the chain to check that teachers are accurately applying assessment criteria when grading pupils' work.

Safeguarding roles and responsibilities are much clearer and lines of accountability are now better established. The trust's safeguarding system leader, who is part of the RET, has worked effectively with the school's safeguarding leaders. She vigilantly oversees their work and has made sure that they apply greater scrutiny in responding to allegations made by pupils against staff. Clearer guidelines have been laid down about staff conduct. Staff now use more neutral language when describing concerns they have about pupils, which is helping make the atmosphere around the school less confrontational and calmer.

Senior leaders are now clearer about their areas of responsibility. They work effectively with system leaders from the RET, who have significant educational experience, which they effectively bring to bear on their roles. Together they are making a strong contribution to moving the school forward.

Members of the RET have established procedures and protocols to minimise the conflict inherent in their dual roles, simultaneously holding the school to account and helping to implement changes. For example, the regional education director, who leads the RET, is held to account by the academy chain's directors.

Weaknesses in the school's approach to securing improvement

More emphasis is required in the school's improvement plans (both shorter plans and the longer statement of action) about the role that the regional education team has in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of planned actions.

Following governance changes, new lines of accountability are being established to enable the academy chain's directors to hold the regional education director and the RET to account for the school's progress. There is a lack of clarity about how any concerns or actions suggested by the chain's directors are followed up by the regional educational director and the regional education team.

The leadership and expertise of some inexperienced, new faculty leaders and senior leaders is not strong enough for them to improve teaching further and take the school into the next phase of its development. For example, the leadership of literacy is not as well developed as leadership of some other aspects, which is holding back some pupils' progress.

Leaders at all levels, including those in the RET, have not focused enough on monitoring how effectively recommendations from the external review of pupil premium funding have been implemented.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Some aspects of teaching, learning and assessment practice are improving. There is now a high degree of consistency across the school in the use of agreed approaches to giving pupils feedback and to the starts of lessons. These approaches are helping pupils to focus more fully on learning and make better progress than before.

Teachers provide pupils with feedback that is closely in line with the school's policy and pupils are now much clearer about what they need to do to make their work better. They are making good use of teachers' suggestions when completing follow-on work and also when completing practice examination questions.

Overall, teachers' practice is more consistently strong in Year 11 than in other years, although there are pockets of stronger teaching in Years 7 to 10. In some key stage 3 classes, pupils are working well because there have been substantial changes to the curriculum and to the approaches teachers employ when planning tasks. In Year 7, pupils identified as needing to catch up, benefit from teaching that is well suited to their learning needs. For example, pupils are improving their calculation skills because they have to give the correct change when participating in role plays in the special 'maths shop' that teachers have introduced. Similarly, in Year 9, teachers relate learning to real-life well, so pupils are motivated to delve deeper into the carefully chosen topics they study. Disadvantaged pupils have benefited from this approach, because it has rightly and deliberately been implemented in classes where there are many of these pupils.

In a number of classes in Years 7 to 10, pupils are learning well because they are taught by the same strong teacher for mathematics, English, and a few other subjects. In such classes, teachers make good use of the detailed knowledge they have of pupils' learning needs. Having the same teacher for several subjects is helping pupils to become more enthusiastic about learning and giving them confidence in some basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, not all teachers have sufficient subject expertise to develop the mathematical reasoning skills of pupils with the potential to achieve highly in mathematics. Pupils with potential do not always apply their mathematical knowledge at a deep enough level. Across Years 7 to 10, as a general rule, where changes have not been fully implemented, teaching is not as effective and pupils' progress is slower. For example, some teachers do not build well enough on pupils' starting points. The questions they ask are not probing enough to check whether pupils have a deep grasp of the subject matter. Leaders have robust plans in place to ensure that improvements are implemented consistently across all classes and subjects in the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders' consistent focus on improving behaviour is successful. Across the school, during lessons and at breaktimes, pupils' conduct is much better. Senior leaders,

including the headteacher and executive principal are highly visible around the school. They effectively demonstrate how to manage pupils in a positive yet assertive manner; other staff benefit from observing them in action. Pupils identify improvements in behaviour as having had the biggest positive impact on their learning, enjoyment, and the value they place on their education.

New systems for managing pupils' behaviour, which include a greater focus on teachers explaining to pupils what they have done wrong, are working well. There has been a substantial reduction in disruptive behaviour in lessons and around the school. Teachers ensure that behaviour at changeover times is calm and consistently follow agreed protocols for the starts of lessons. Pupils told inspectors that they welcomed the more focused starts of lessons, which help them to settle down quickly. However, the ends of lessons are not as tightly focused in some practical subjects. Leaders are also aware that they need to improve the way pupils are managed when they are withdrawn from class, in keeping with the school's behaviour code. They have strong plans in place to do this, which include relocating and redesigning the 'time-out' room.

Leaders have been increasingly successful at reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions. This has been a gradual process because there was a period at the start of the academic year when fixed-term exclusions were high. During this brief spell, leaders sensibly decided to use exclusion, as a last resort, with pupils who persistently refused to adhere to the new code of conduct. This approach worked well and pupils who had been resistant complied. Overall, since September 2016 to the current date, fixed-term exclusions have dropped, when compared to the same period last year. Pupils' attendance has also improved, when compared with the same period last academic year. However, it is still too low. The school's leaders have robust plans for improving this, which include providing transport for pupils who live a long way from the school.

Outcomes for pupils

From a low base, outcomes are improving, especially in Year 11 and in some key stage 3 classes where teaching is more effective. Key stage 4 published results in 2016 indicated weak progress for pupils across a number of subjects and very weak progress for disadvantaged pupils. Based on the practice tests they undertake regularly, current Year 11 pupils' progress is improving across a range of subjects. Improvements are most noticeable in mathematics, the three separate sciences, business studies and performing arts. Due to difficulties in recruitment, teaching is weaker in core and additional science. Consequently, pupils' progress is much slower than it is in the separate science subjects. Leaders swiftly identify Year 11 pupils who are struggling and ensure that they receive effective, well-planned, additional support and assistance. This support has been particularly focused on disadvantaged pupils.

School leaders are working well with teachers to improve the accuracy of their

assessments, following a wide gulf between predictions and actual GCSE results in 2016. Leaders have also made effective use of teachers from partner academies to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments and identify any inconsistencies. As a result, teachers are now more in line with partner academies when assessing pupils' answers in practice tests. Prediction processes have been strengthened, although it is too early to say whether GCSE predictions for 2017 are more accurate than they were for 2016.

Across the school, some pupils' achievement, especially those who are disadvantaged, is adversely affected by their poor writing skills. Pupils who can articulate strong levels of understanding do not always convey the same depth of understanding in their writing. In particular, their skills in explaining ideas, events and concepts are underdeveloped.

External support

Most external support has been effective because it is largely provided by system leaders. They use their expertise well to support the school in key areas of safeguarding, inclusion and tracking of pupils' progress. The regional education director is providing substantial support on a daily basis in his role as executive principal. Partner academies have made a positive contribution to developing teachers' ability to apply success criteria accurately when assessing pupils' work. The impact of the external review of pupil premium funding has been limited because the RET has not placed enough focus on monitoring how effectively and promptly emerging recommendations have been implemented.