

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



30 May 2017

Mr Richard Senior
Interim Principal
Bolton St Catherine's Academy
Stich-Mi-Lane
Brightmet
Bolton
Greater Manchester
BL2 4HU

Dear Mr Senior

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bolton St Catherine's Academy

Following my visit to the academy on 15 May 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement, following the section 5 inspection in May 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

Leaders should take further action to:

- improve the accuracy and reliability of information on pupils' progress
- improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom
- include clearer, quantifiable measures of impact in the school development plan
- ensure that the pupil premium funding is focused on what will make a difference

to pupils' learning and that the impact is made clear.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the interim principal, other senior leaders, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the sponsor designate to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and pupil premium strategy were evaluated. A learning walk and work scrutiny were undertaken with senior leaders. A range of documentation regarding school improvement was considered.

Context

Since the inspection, the principal has left and a new chair of governors has been elected. A new headteacher has been appointed for September 2017 and a number of middle leaders have been appointed. The school has entered discussions to change to a multi-academy trust (MAT) and to join a new trust with local schools from which support is currently being given.

Main findings

An enormous task lies ahead until the school delivers a good standard of education. While leaders are not deluded, actions to tackle the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection have been too slow, fragile and fragmented. Since January 2017, a significant number of changes have taken place, which has steered the school onto a new course. Nonetheless, these changes are insufficient to bring about the necessary improvements.

Following the inspection in May 2016, the achievement of pupils at the end of Year 11 was worse than the highly disappointing results of the preceding year. Less than one fifth of pupils attained a good pass in English and mathematics. For disadvantaged pupils, the figure was about one tenth. The progress made by all pupils was in the lowest 10% of all schools nationally. These results were not anticipated and came as a devastating blow to the school community. It was after these results that leaders and governors undertook serious soul-searching and strengthened their resolve to take action.

The tardy pace to tackle improvements is not limited to the period following the results in 2016. In the past five years, the school has been judged to require improvement on three occasions. The pupils in this school deserve better. Leaders acknowledge that excuses and 'business as usual' can no longer be tolerated. Significant and sustainable changes need to be made. Governance has been reviewed and new appointments to leadership have taken place, although many of these do not take effect until September 2017.

The school development plan correctly identifies the areas requiring improvement. However, the plan is lacking in precision and focus. Too many statements of impact are anecdotal and unquantifiable in terms of the difference they would make to pupils' learning. Similarly, the pupil premium strategy is lacking in the necessary precision as to what will make a difference and how leaders and governors will know. This prevents governors from being able to monitor effectiveness and progress with the rigour that is needed. Until recently, governors were too acquiescent of what they were being told by leaders. Governors' minutes demonstrate an increased level of challenge.

Leaders and governors know that the quality of teaching and learning must improve and that this is what will make the positive difference to the lives of the pupils at this school. Actions so far have not been focused enough on this aspect of school improvement and too much precious time has been lost. Work in pupils' books and information regarding their progress do not correlate. The information that leaders have is providing a flawed picture of pupils' learning. This masks the slow and sluggish rates of progress across year groups and subjects. Little confidence can be placed in the accuracy of the progress that pupils are currently making. Leaders have not been successful in securing firm foundations on which to move forward at the required pace.

Improving the rates of attendance is a success story. The proportion of pupils who attend regularly is better than in previous years. This has come about through clarifying roles and responsibilities, increasing accountability and consistent adherence to the expectations of pupils, parents and staff. A higher proportion of pupils still need to attend more regularly, and closer working with parents is beginning to result in improved attendance. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is still too high, but is reducing. A similar picture can be seen in attendance of sixth-form pupils.

The pupils that I spoke to were very clear that behaviour in the classrooms has improved considerably. They spoke about the impact that teachers have when the pupils know that teachers care for them and have their best interests at heart. At the same time, they said that they do not think that this is the case for all teachers, and that behaviour in lessons can be disruptive. The clearer behaviour policy has helped considerably, although the pupils do not think that it is routinely followed by all staff. Pupils also think that there is too much name-calling that goes unchallenged.

The primary phase of the school remains a strength. The previous inspection asked that the use of the outdoor area in the early years be improved. The opportunities for outdoor play in the early years have been developed and built into the curriculum. However, the outdoor resources for the children are still limited. We spoke about exploiting the large outside area to full effect and investing in a wider

variety of resources to match the quality and range of what is inside classrooms.

External support

The school is working closely with a teaching school with which it hopes to establish a MAT. A national leader of education (NLE) is deployed for two days per week. She has an accurate understanding of what actions need to be taken, but does not have the mandate to make the necessary changes. Specialist leaders of education (SLEs) are working closely and cooperatively with leaders. The findings of the SLEs' reviews are indicative of the extent of changes required. Staff are showing a willingness and professionalism to act on advice given. They also benefit from sharing good practice.

An external review of pupil premium funding was carried out in October 2016. It identified where strengths and weaknesses lay in terms of provision. Evidence gathered from this inspection indicates that there is a lot more than needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching and learning for these pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector