

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



14 June 2017

Mrs Nicola Jethwa
Headteacher
Abbs Cross Academy and Arts College
Abbs Cross Lane
Hornchurch
Essex
RM12 4YB

Dear Mrs Jethwa

Special measures monitoring inspection of Abbs Cross Academy and Arts College

Following my visit with Joan Deslandes, Ofsted Inspector and Hayley Follett, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 23 to 24 May 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 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 June 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may 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 Havering. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Hallett

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that, as soon as possible and by no later than the end of the Autumn term 2015, all safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements. These include:
 - checking and completing all records accurately
 - updating all policies and procedures to reflect recent statutory guidance, including 'Keeping Children Safe in Education', 2015 and 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'
 - checking that training and procedures are effective, with good support systems in place that will enable staff to speak out if they have concerns.

- Develop the skills of governors to hold leaders and staff to account for students' achievement and the overall effectiveness of the school.

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders at all levels by:
 - using assessment information rigorously to identify patterns and trends so that actions for improvement are carefully planned and evaluated to identify the needs of boys, the most able disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs.
 - building the capacity of middle and senior leaders to sustain improvements.

- Improve teaching to consistently good or better, so that it impacts on students' progress, by ensuring that:
 - teachers provide work, including homework, that enables all students, including boys, the most able, disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs to make good progress at all times
 - teachers give students clear guidance and evaluative comments on how to improve their work.

- Raise ambition and achievement across all subjects, particularly for the most able students so that they achieve consistently at the higher grades.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 23 May 2017 to 24 May 2017

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and members of the teaching staff. Meetings were also held with the chief executive officer of the Loxford School Trust and with the chair of the governing body. Inspectors visited classes across year groups and subjects to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. Many of these visits were made jointly with senior leaders, achievement team leaders and curriculum team leaders.

Inspectors spoke with pupils from all year groups to listen to their views of the school and also talked to pupils informally at break and lunchtime. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons and also visited classes at form time.

Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation of the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on pupils' progress. Inspectors scrutinised information about pupils' current progress in all year groups, with a particular focus on the progress of: pupils in mathematics and science; disadvantaged pupils; the most able; and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Inspectors also looked at attendance and safeguarding records, including the single central record of recruitment checks on staff.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in February 2017, there have been no further changes in staffing. The senior team, consisting of the headteacher, two deputy headteachers and six assistant headteachers, is also stable. Currently there are no teaching vacancies for September and appointments have been made to replace the small number of teachers leaving at the end of the summer term.

There have been some changes to governance. The interim executive board has been dissolved and a new governing body structure has been set up under the leadership of the previous chair of the interim executive board, who is a national leader of governance. The new governing body has nine members, including two elected parent governors.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has continued to lead by example and challenges her senior team and staff to do their utmost to improve the school for the benefit of the pupils. This culture of respect and aspiration is becoming firmly embedded in the school. Members of the senior team have established more autonomy in their roles, developing strong practice and taking responsibility in their areas. Their confident

presence around the school acts as a powerful role model for staff and pupils.

Curriculum and achievement team leaders visited classes with inspectors to look at features of teaching and learning. Inspectors were impressed with the quality of middle leaders' evaluations and agreed with their identification of strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Middle leaders were insightful and perceptive, demonstrating a clear understanding how pupils learn and how teaching promotes pupils' learning and progress.

Middle leaders are consistently focussed on the progress made by different groups of pupils, in line with this priority for school improvement. They use the information from monitoring teaching effectively to reflect on their own practice and develop the work of their own teams. Subject leaders demonstrated strong leadership capacity to drive the improvement of teaching across the school.

The new governing body has continued the work of the interim executive body. It provides challenge to senior leaders and ensures that the information about the school's progress is sufficient for governors to hold leaders to account for pupils' rates of progress. The chair of the governing body understands the school's strengths and weaknesses. New governors have had training and are familiar with the school's up-to-date information.

The school's work to keep pupils safe is effective. The single central record of staff recruitment checks meets requirements and is regularly checked and signed by the headteacher and governor for safeguarding. Systems for following up concerns are robust and record keeping is effective.

Although much has been achieved to nurture a strong leadership team, the focus of leaders' work is not yet sharp enough to eradicate inconsistencies in teaching. The headteacher and senior leaders recognise that there is more to be done.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve, However there are still notable pockets of inconsistency, particularly in science and mathematics.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and this is now a strength across the school. Pupils want to do well and say that they are now aiming for higher grades than they previously thought possible. This is as a result of leaders' strong focus and effective work in raising pupils' aspiration and ambition. Pupils are increasingly resilient learners and when faced with challenging and difficult work, they demonstrate high levels of motivation and endeavour.

Relationships between teachers and pupils are strong. This creates a positive environment for learning in classes. Teachers make their expectations very clear;

pupils understand these expectations, apply themselves well and work hard. They have high levels of concentration and are often completely engrossed in an activity.

Relationships between pupils are strong. They listen to each other and respect and challenge each other's views when working together in pairs and groups. This has a positive impact on pupils' progress.

Teachers' questioning is now having a stronger impact on pupils' learning. For example, in English, the teacher's precise probing questioning enabled pupils to give their views on character, use supporting quotes from the text, and to challenge each other with their different views. In construction, pupils responded positively to the teacher's individual targeted questioning to improve their project evaluation. However, this is not a consistent picture and sometimes teachers do not use questioning effectively to check if pupils have understood the work.

Teachers' use of assessment information is still too variable. While all teachers are aware of pupils' needs and starting points, they do not always use this information effectively to plan teaching activities. Where this information is used well, resources are adapted to meet pupils' needs and learning support assistants are deployed effectively with precise directions from the teacher.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy their work and concentrate well. Pupils behave well in classes and this has a strong impact on their ability to learn and make progress. Pupils are clear that behaviour continues to improve and say that learning is very rarely disrupted. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well.

Pupils' conduct around the school site is calm and orderly. Senior staff and year 'care teams' are always on the corridors during classes and at break and lunchtime. It is always easy for pupils to find a member of staff. Pupils like the high levels of adult supervision and that adults are vigilant in looking after their welfare. The work of the year 'care teams' supports pupils' personal development and welfare effectively

Pupils' attendance has risen since the last academic year. Attendance information is rigorously analysed and patterns identified so that pupils and families can receive appropriate support from the attendance officer and other key staff. Pupils' attendance overall is now above the national average and well above national figures in key stage 3. The attendance of key groups, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are all rising. The attendance of these groups has improved since 2016.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils currently in the school are making better progress in English because the quality of teaching has improved. Teachers use assessment information about their pupils effectively to plan challenging, imaginative activities. These enable pupils to develop a love of literature and make good progress in their understanding of text as well as in their own writing.

Pupils' reading is also developing rapidly. The school's policy of reading at the start of every lesson, alongside other reading initiatives, is having a positive impact on pupils' reading comprehension. Pupils are keen to take advantage of opportunities to read in class and are confident readers. Pupils almost always choose appropriate texts which challenge their reading skills and interest them.

Pupils' speaking skills have improved rapidly. Pupils are now more confident and keen to express themselves in class. They respond well to teachers' questioning and ask their own questions of the teacher.

Pupils' learning in mathematics is improving but their rates of progress remain variable, reflecting the uneven levels of challenge between classes.

Pupils are not making sufficient progress in science because the curriculum is not well planned. Some classes do work that is too easy for them. Other classes are given work that is far too hard as pupils do not have the basic knowledge needed to understand the concepts being studied. As a result, learning is sometimes superficial. For example, pupils studying DNA could talk enthusiastically about the helix and 'base pairs' but without a secure understanding of this terminology, the function of DNA in a cell and cell biology.

Pupils enjoy practical work in science but say that they do not get many opportunities to do this. This view is confirmed by the lack of reference to practical work in pupils' books. Pupils' experience of science practical experiments is sporadic, so they cannot develop their skills over time. Practical work is sometimes seen as a reward rather than an integral part of learning in the subject.

Leaders recognise that the pace of change in science has been too slow. However, changes to the curriculum have already been made at GCSE and are having a positive impact on progress and attainment of pupils in Year 10. Intervention for Year 11 pupils has ensured that attainment is rising across the triple science subjects. A new key stage 3 curriculum is being implemented. New leadership is in place for September.

Disadvantaged pupils are making better progress. The progress of boys has also improved, with considerable gains from the school's focus on speaking and reading. The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is inconsistent.

External support

The Loxford School Trust has continued to provide effective support and challenge to school leaders, concentrating their efforts on specific areas such as science and mathematics. Now that the trust has taken a step back from day-to-day support, school leaders take full responsibility for their areas and are developing their own leadership capacity and that of their teams.