

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr M Jennings
Copley Academy
Huddersfield Road
Stalybridge
Cheshire
SK15 3RR

Dear Mr Jennings

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Copley Academy

Following my visit to your school on 13 June 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.

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, governors and members of the trust should resubmit their action plan and a concise report of the progress made towards becoming a good school. These documents should be sent to Ofsted by 30 September 2017.

The school should take further action to:

- rapidly improve the progress that pupils make across the school, especially in English, mathematics and science
- take swift action to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils across the school
- ensure that pupil premium funding is focused on what will make a difference to pupils' learning and that the impact of spending is clear and quantifiable
- improve senior and middle leadership by stabilising staffing, clarifying roles and

ensuring appropriate accountability for school improvement

- ensure that the school improvement plan includes all the areas for improvement from the last inspection report with clear, quantifiable measures of impact
- continue to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that the evaluation of the quality of teaching is accurate and robust.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative from the academy trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A learning walk was undertaken with a senior leader. A range of documentation relating to school improvement was also considered. A scrutiny of pupils' work was also undertaken.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a review of staffing has been undertaken which has resulted in a deputy headteacher taking redundancy. The trust and the governing body have also commissioned a review of teaching and learning responsibility payments for middle leaders. The principal is currently absent from school. A new chief executive officer has been appointed to the trust. She is now supporting the leadership team in order to make the necessary improvements to the school. The school continues to be part of the Great Academies Education Trust.

Main findings

The trust, leaders and governors recognise that there is much work to be undertaken until the school delivers a good standard of education. Governors and representatives from the trust are rightly frustrated about the slow pace of change that has thwarted their efforts to improve the school since the previous inspection. The trust, governors and current senior leaders are honest and accurate in their appraisal of the standard of education that their pupils receive. They recognise that there is still a significant journey to undertake. This is because their desire to transform the school has been hampered by a lack of vision and clarity at senior leadership level. Until very recently, it is clear that leaders have not demonstrated sufficient capacity to bring about the necessary improvements. Consequently, significant challenges still lie ahead.

Following the inspection in May 2016, the progress made by pupils at the end of key stage 4 showed little signs of improvement. The progress made by pupils in English, mathematics and science remained very low and fragile. Boys made very poor progress across most of their subjects. Girls underachieved in English and mathematics. The most able pupils underachieved significantly in English and mathematics. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils was in the bottom 10%

nationally of all schools. That said, pupils' attainment improved. The proportion of pupils who achieved a good pass in English and mathematics rose to 59%. Outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remained broadly average in 2016.

The poor rate of improvement in pupils' progress is not limited to 2016. The trust, governors and current senior leaders recognise that they must focus much more intensely on ensuring that current pupils make the progress of which they are capable. Most recently, leaders have strengthened their resolve to take the necessary action. However, they recognise that they have not been able to take swift enough action to ensure that outcomes for this year's Year 11 pupils will be any better. Leaders, governors and the trust are now adamant that the school's fortunes must change. There are, however, signs of improved progress in key stage 3.

Since the previous inspection, the action plan to improve the quality of education across the school has not been fit for purpose. The action plan does not tackle fully the areas identified in the previous inspection report. For example, there is little or no reference to improving outcomes in mathematics, English and science. There are no quantifiable success criteria on which governors and the trust can hold leaders to account. The plan is lacking in precision and focus. Added to this, there is currently no strategic plan to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, despite their outcomes being so poor. These deficiencies have prevented governors from being able to monitor the effectiveness of leaders' work with the precision needed. They have hindered governors from fulfilling their roles effectively. Governors rightly have felt disheartened by the tardy rate of improvement.

That said, under the direction of the deputy headteacher, leaders have begun to strengthen their approach to assessment. They have also reviewed senior leaders' roles and established new ways of communicating the effectiveness of their work to governors and the trust. The trust has also, with the new support of the chief executive officer, written a strategic improvement plan to address the issues facing the school. The support currently being provided by a former national lead in education is welcomed. However, it is far too soon to see the impact of those changes on the overall quality of education that the school provides.

Leaders and governors have, however, begun to tackle successfully some key areas of teaching and learning. They know that this is what will make the biggest difference to pupils' outcomes across the school. Actions to improve teaching have so far focused on ensuring that the marking and feedback policy is implemented more consistently across the school. As a result of this work, pupils report that they are more confident in taking the next steps in their learning because they now know what to do to improve. Furthermore, leaders have made substantial improvements to the quality of teachers' questioning. Ongoing teacher training has focused on how teachers can address misconceptions through their questioning techniques. Teachers use a range of techniques with varying success to deepen pupils'

knowledge, skills and understanding. Leaders recognise that there is still much work to do in this area.

Another area of leaders' work that shows improvement is the development of literacy across the curriculum. Leaders are successfully helping pupils to improve their reading ages by encouraging a love of reading. Pupils are writing extended answers in their books, using a more age-appropriate range of vocabulary. Increasingly, teachers are supporting pupils' development in spelling, punctuation and grammar, although this is still inconsistent.

Leaders have been less successful in ensuring that pupils are routinely challenged in lessons to make the progress of which they are capable. For example, pupils' work over time shows that they can and should achieve more. In mathematics, for example, there is insufficient emphasis placed on developing pupils' problem-solving skills. In some subjects, pupils routinely get answers correct because they are under challenged in relation to their starting points. Leaders recognise that there is no quick fix and they have begun to strengthen provision more successfully in key stage 3. Leaders know that they must adopt an appropriate assessment system that meets the needs of the pupils in the school. Once this is fully in place, they will be able to quickly measure the progress being made by pupils with more accuracy.

Another benefit of developing a new assessment system is to provide leaders and governors with accurate information on which to hold teachers and middle leaders to account. Currently, the assessment systems are not used effectively to drive pupils' progress. Leaders are unable to discuss how much progress pupils are making across subjects and across the school. This is because some leaders have taken on new roles and systems are just being introduced. Leaders know that they need to be much more rigorous in holding teachers to account for different groups of pupils' progress, for example disadvantaged pupils and the most able.

Added to this, systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning are not yet rigorous enough. Senior leaders currently undertake most monitoring tasks. Middle leaders do not yet have the skills to undertake the rigour of monitoring that is required to move the school forward. Leaders know this and they have plans in place to train middle leaders once school-wide systems have been refined and are appropriate.

Finally, leaders have undertaken much successful work to ensure that pupils are ready to learn, behave well and show an interest in their lessons. The pupils I spoke with were clear that behaviour in lessons has improved considerably. Pupils are aware that their teachers care for them and want them to succeed. They are safe in school because leaders ensure that they are happy and that all relevant safeguarding procedures are fully in place.

External support

Leaders are working closely with the new chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust. The CEO of the trust is currently deployed to support leaders for half a day per week. In September, the CEO will be based in the school more frequently until the necessary improvements are made. The trust directors have also appointed four teaching and learning consultants to work across their schools, including with the leadership team and staff at Copley Academy.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Smart
Her Majesty's Inspector