

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



8 January 2018

Miss Afsheen Nawaz
Waterside Combined School
Black Horse Avenue
Chesham
Buckinghamshire
HP5 1QU

Dear Miss Nawaz

Special measures monitoring inspection of Waterside Combined School

Following my visit to your school on 13–14 December 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 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 June 2016.

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.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve safeguarding by ensuring all requirements are fully met, particularly those relating to staff training and the safety of the school site.
- Establish capacity in leadership at all levels in the school, including the leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Urgently improve leadership and governance by ensuring:
 - that safeguarding arrangements are focused on keeping pupils and children safe
 - new leaders, existing leaders and temporary leaders raise their expectations of how well pupils behave, how much progress they make and how effectively they are taught
 - the well-focused improvement plans already in place are fully implemented, rigorously monitored and evaluated, and changes are made promptly if actions are not having their anticipated impact
 - funding for disadvantaged pupils improves their outcomes and attendance.
- Improve teaching so a greater proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with lower starting points, meet age-related expectations as a minimum by:
 - setting tasks that enable the majority of pupils to gain the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding, especially in mathematics and writing
 - delivering the content specified in the 2014 national curriculum, so pupils are prepared for the increased challenge of key stages 1 and 2 tests and assessments
 - providing teachers with the training, support and challenge they need to develop and then convey their subject knowledge to pupils, to enable them to make greater strides in their learning in core and non-core subjects
 - ensuring that pupils are consistently set targets to promote accelerated progress.
- Make sure all pupils and children, including most-able pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, fulfil their potential by:
 - providing pupils with tasks, including homework tasks, that are sufficiently demanding
 - asking questions which require pupils and children to think hard.

■ Improve pupils' behaviour by:

- providing effective support for the small number of pupils who have additional behavioural needs so they do not disrupt other pupils, and are able to engage more fully with learning in class
- recording incidents of bullying in greater detail, including pupils' use of discriminatory language
- further developing recent, more effective approaches to managing pupils' poor behaviour.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 13–14 December 2017

Evidence

During this monitoring inspection, I visited all classes to observe learning. You accompanied me on some of the visits to classrooms on both days of the inspection. I looked at pupils' books and met with leaders to discuss the progress pupils are making. I met with you and other staff, including the assistant headteacher and special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). I also met with two representatives from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust (BLT) and three members of the governing body. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. Together, we had a tour of the school's site which included checks on the security and access to the school. I observed an assembly and pupils' playtime. I spoke with pupils during my visits to lessons, and also met with a group of 12 pupils from Years 1 to 6. I scrutinised a range of the school's documents and policies, records relating to safeguarding and advisers' notes of their visits to the school. In addition, I checked the single central record.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been some changes to the governing body. However, five of the nine members of the governing body were governors at the time of the previous inspection. The current chair of the governing body was the chair at the time of the previous inspection.

Since June 2016, there have been many interim leadership arrangements and the school has had no permanent headteacher. An interim headteacher was appointed to the school in September 2016 and a deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2017. During the summer term 2017, the deputy headteacher became acting headteacher for a significant period, due to the prolonged, unforeseen absence of the interim headteacher.

The interim headteacher left the school in July 2017. The deputy headteacher has been the acting headteacher since September 2017 and a new interim headteacher will be joining the school in January 2018. The SENCo took up her post in September 2016. Two other members of the leadership team have resigned their positions.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Frequent changes in the leadership of the school, coupled with uncertainty about the school's future conversion to academy status, have hampered the school's progress. The school's early plans and discussions with various potential sponsors have not come to fruition. By January 2018, the school will have had three different interim headteachers since the previous inspection in June 2016. The governing body has not acted with sufficient urgency to secure effective, stable leadership

arrangements at the school. For example, a decision about the interim headteacher, due to start in January 2018, was only made in the second week of December. This has resulted in uncertainty for staff, pupils and parents, and a lack of leadership capacity and continuity. As a result, the school continues to need a high level of external support. The local authority's consultation on the potential closure of the Nursery has compounded the school's difficulties. Uncertainty about the future of the Nursery has led to a very low take-up of the school's Nursery provision.

Leaders have not given sufficient attention and focus to improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement. The pace of improvement is far too slow and leaders have not acted with sufficient haste to stem the steep decline in standards in key stage 2. Improvements to improve some aspects of the school's work have only just got under way. The school's improvement plan is unwieldy and lacks precision. It does not provide a clear enough picture of the school's priorities for improvement, nor set out sufficiently clear milestones to evaluate progress over time. As a result, staff are not clear about the school's priorities, and there is a lack of focus and direction to the school's planned improvements.

Leaders acknowledge that, until this term, they have not had reliable assessment information about the progress pupils are making. The delay in establishing a reliable assessment system means that leaders and governors do not have clear information about progress rates for pupils. At the time of this monitoring visit, leaders were still unable to provide assessment information about the progress and attainment of groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. Governors acknowledge that they have not held leaders to account because they have not had the necessary assessment and progress information. While governors were aware of concerns about pupils' progress in key stage 2 in 2017, they were not aware of the significance of the drop in the school's performance as a result of pupils' extremely low attainment and progress.

Governors have ensured that the external reviews of governance and the school's spending of the pupil premium grant were completed in a timely manner. However, governors and leaders have not yet implemented many of the recommendations made in these reports. These include the recommended close tracking of the progress of disadvantaged pupils, and the recommendation for governors to hold leaders to account fully about the impact of teaching on pupils' progress.

The pupil premium spending plans for this year and evaluations of the impact of those for the previous school year were only completed by an external consultant at the beginning of December. They were published on the website on the first day of this monitoring visit. These plans lack rigour. They do not include precise enough criteria to enable leaders and governors to evaluate the success of their planned actions. There remains a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, particularly for disadvantaged pupils' outcomes and attendance.

The acting headteacher has implemented a number of positive changes including

improvements to safeguarding. Training records are up to date and there are good systems for the reporting, recording and referring of any concerns about pupils. The school's site security has improved considerably. However, while safeguarding arrangements are now much improved, there are weaknesses in leaders' understanding and management of risk, and in response to changing circumstances. For example, during the second day of the monitoring visit, there were unsatisfactory supervision arrangements to ensure pupils' safety during playtime.

With the support of the adviser from the BLT, the acting headteacher has taken action to tackle underperformance and put plans in place to support individual members of staff. The acting headteacher has a good understanding of where teaching is strong and where teaching is not yet good enough. The SENCo has introduced new systems for identifying and providing timely support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Support plans for these pupils are of good quality. The new curriculum overviews and mathematics scheme of work provide helpful frameworks for staff to plan from. The English and mathematics leaders give useful guidance and support to their colleagues, and regularly monitor and check pupils' books and teachers' planning. The work of other subject leaders is less well developed and, until very recently, there has not been a science leader. Training has not taken place for most subject leaders.

Leaders have worked hard to increase parental engagement. Parents are positive about the school and are pleased that the school is now more stable and settled. Parents spoken to during the inspection are satisfied that their children enjoy school and are kept safe at school. The website includes some helpful information for parents including regular newsletters about the school's events. However, the school's website is not yet fully compliant because it does not include all the required statutory information.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching has not improved quickly enough. While there are some pockets of good practice, teaching is still far too variable and not enough teaching is good or better. This is particularly the case in key stage 2 where there is still some inadequate teaching. Improved teaching led to a rise in pupils' achievement in key stage 1. However, leaders' actions to improve the overall quality of teaching have sometimes stalled because of frequent changes of staff, recruitment difficulties and staff absence.

In some classes, teachers do not take enough account of pupils' previous learning. This means that many tasks are either too easy or too challenging to enable pupils to learn well. Pupils typically repeat calculations they have already mastered and are not moved on quickly enough to more challenging work. There are also limited opportunities for pupils to apply their skills to solve problems. Writing tasks are often too broad and teachers do not give enough guidance to help pupils to write well.

Leaders have written a list of sensible 'non-negotiables' for teachers. However, these have yet to be established or embedded in many classes. There are, therefore, widely different expectations and approaches to learning across the school. In some classes, teachers' expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour are too low. As a result, in these classes, pupils do not take pride in their learning and the quality and presentation of their work are not good.

The pupils' progress meetings and portfolios of pupils' writing are helping to improve teachers' understanding of the expected standards for writing. The new mathematics scheme of work provides good guidance for teachers' planning, ensuring appropriate breadth of curriculum. In addition, the revised curriculum overviews have raised teachers' expectations and deepened their understanding of the revised national curriculum. However, while these frameworks are establishing clearer expectations, pupils' learning in many subjects is not well developed. In some classes, pupils have covered too little of the wider curriculum and their work in books is sporadic.

New targets for pupils' achievement are helping to raise teachers' expectations. Training in English and mathematics has helped to improve teachers' knowledge, and staff appreciate the way leaders and their colleagues support them. Teachers value the training that they have received to help them implement the school's new system of assessment. Leaders are taking appropriate action to make sure that teachers' assessments and target setting are more accurate. They have drawn on effective external support from the BLT to help them with this. Nevertheless, the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is still at an early stage of development. This means that teachers do not yet understand how well all groups of pupils are learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders' good work to strengthen systems for managing pupils' behaviour has had a positive impact. Since the previous inspection, there have been significant improvements to pupils' behaviour. In the majority of classes, pupils behave well. They are courteous and respectful and there is a positive climate for learning. However, this is in sharp contrast to classes where teaching is not good. In a minority of classes, pupils' behaviour and attitudes remain a concern.

The school's new behaviour policy has ensured that there is much greater consistency of approach to managing pupils' behaviour. There are now clear rewards for good behaviour and consequences for poor behaviour. Any incidents of poor behaviour are appropriately logged and carefully analysed by leaders. This means that leaders now have a clear oversight of pupils' behaviour and are able to identify any trends or patterns. The small number of pupils who have additional behavioural needs are supported well through individual plans.

Pupils report that behaviour in the school is now much better and that any incidents are followed up promptly by staff. On the other hand, in classes where behaviour is not consistently good, pupils say that their learning is sometimes disrupted by other pupils. Pupils report that bullying now rarely happens and that if it does, staff respond swiftly to address any issues. Records of the school's bullying logs confirm that incidents of poor behaviour and bullying have declined notably since the previous inspection. There has also been a reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions.

Attendance remains below the national average and has declined slightly over the past year. However, there has been a reduction in the number of pupils who are persistently absent. In addition, disadvantaged pupils' attendance is showing signs of improvement and there is also a reduction in the number of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent. Nevertheless, absence is still high for disadvantaged pupils. The school's family support worker has effectively supported vulnerable families to help them overcome the barriers to their children's regular attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

In 2017, pupils' progress at the end of Year 6 was significantly below average and in the bottom 10% of that seen nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment at the end of key stage 2 was very low and only one pupil achieved the expected standard in all three subjects.

Attainment in key stage 1 improved in 2017. The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. Pupils also attained well in the Year 1 phonics screening check. However, the proportion of children in the early years who achieved the expected level of development was well below the national average.

The progress of current pupils remains too variable and, across the school, too few pupils are working at the expected standard for their age. The delay in establishing a robust system of tracking and assessment means that, until this term, teachers and leaders have not had a clear view of pupils' achievement in relation to the age-related expectations. Assessments for one class in key stage 2 are yet to be completed, as is the analysis of the progress of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils. Consequently, there is insufficient assessment information to check the extent to which gaps are narrowing for particular groups of pupils.

The school's assessment information and work in pupils' books show that there are wide variations between year groups. Although there are signs of improvement, and pupils in the current Year 6 are on track to achieve much better standards, this is not sustained throughout the school. Pupils in Year 1 have significant ground to make up because of low achievement at the end of the early years, particularly in writing. Pupils' progress is not accelerating quickly enough to enable them to overcome previous underachievement. In many classes, weaknesses in pupils'

sentence construction and punctuation persist and are not systematically addressed. Insufficient opportunities for pupils to solve problems in mathematics limit their skills and understanding.

In some classes pupils do not complete enough work. This is because teachers' expectations are not high enough, some pupils are not given enough guidance and tasks do not meet pupils' needs. While some pupils receive good-quality support from additional adults, the quality of this support across the school is too variable. Pupils' progress has also been hampered by frequent staffing changes, resulting in a lack of continuity for some classes.

External support

Advisers from the BLT have provided a significant amount of support to the school since the school's previous inspection. Their regular reports show that they are providing clear guidance and direction to support improvement. The school continues to receive regular visits from many different professionals to support individual teachers and leaders. The acting headteacher has also enlisted the support of leaders and staff from a local primary school.

However, this support has had limited impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The lack of leadership capacity, and the frequent changes in leadership and teaching staff, have limited leaders' ability to benefit from this support. The school continues to rely heavily on external support and guidance.