

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



9 January 2018

Mr John Szynal
Executive Principal
Bexleyheath Academy
Woolwich Road
Bexleyheath
Kent
DA6 7DA

Dear Mr Szynal

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bexleyheath Academy

Following my visit to your school on 14 December 2017 with Matt Tiplin, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 second 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 and the sponsor trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- stabilise leadership and management within the school so that recently introduced systems can embed and have the intended impact
- improve actions to increase attendance rates for all pupils, particularly pupils currently in Year 11
- develop a consistent approach to behaviour management so that staff and pupils know what they are expected to do, including the use of rewards
- implement changes as a consequence of the curriculum review to support better progress across key stages 3 and 4
- embed the assessment system so that staff can use it more precisely to inform lesson planning.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders, groups of pupils, members of the management board (including the chair), two consultants from the academy trust and representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last monitoring visit. Inspectors visited a range of classrooms with senior leaders and talked to pupils in lessons and at lunchtime. Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including the school's action plans, current assessment information, attendance records, behaviour logs and safeguarding documentation.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the trust has made significant changes to the senior leadership team. You have been in post since September 2017 following the departure of the principal in June 2017. The trust has asked you to continue in the role until July 2018. Other members of the leadership team have left recently. As a result, the senior leadership team is working at reduced capacity. A new head of academy has been appointed from January 2018 and will work alongside you. The trust disbanded the governing body and replaced it with a management board in September 2017. There have been many changes in the teaching and non-teaching staff.

Main findings

You are determined to improve the school and have the experience and capacity to do so. Highly skilled board members strengthen governance and challenge school leaders much more robustly. However, senior leaders acknowledge that the school has not improved since the last monitoring visit. The frequent changes in leadership and management have hindered progress. Strategies put in place previously have not been continued as leaders responsible for implementing them have left. Owing to the significant staffing changes between May and September 2017, the school improvement plans were effectively put on hold.

You accept the inspection findings fully and are candid about the current situation of the school. You have drafted new action plans and have started to put measures in place to address the areas for improvement. These will take time and, above all, consistent leadership and management to come into effect and have a positive impact.

Since September 2017, improvements have been made to secure the school's safeguarding arrangements. You have welcomed support from the local authority, which now visits the school regularly to support the safeguarding team. Leaders accept and act on recommendations made. Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They are very positive about the help and guidance they receive from staff if they have any concerns. Staff are up to date in their training and knowledgeable about

the school's safeguarding procedures. Leaders ensure that pre-recruitment checks are carried out effectively.

In view of the findings at the previous monitoring visit, a key focus for this visit was attendance. Overall attendance has declined and is currently well below the national average. Year 11 pupils' attendance is a particular cause for concern. Inconsistent management of attendance due to staffing changes and a lack of effective strategies to follow up persistent absence have had a negative impact.

School information indicates that pupils' behaviour has not improved since the previous inspection. Pupils are not clear about the behaviour system because it changes regularly. Consequently, behaviour records show that incidents of poor behaviour, such as persistent disruption to lessons and verbal abuse to staff and pupils, continue to be a cause for concern. Staff do not consistently address poor behaviour and pupils believe that former rules no longer exist. As one pupil said, 'Rules are put in place, then vanish.' You have introduced a zero-tolerance approach to poor behaviour, resulting in more fixed-term exclusions than previously. Plans are in place to address behaviour as a matter of urgency.

Leaders have improved the assessment system to focus on pupils' progress. Subject leaders report that this supports their work to target more precise support for individual pupils. However, current assessment information is either incomplete due to staffing changes or showing that current performance, while improving in some areas, is not good enough. Leaders know that more work is needed to have a fully effective assessment system. Pilots of different approaches to assessment show a commitment of senior leaders to both improve assessment procedures while considering staff workload.

Leaders have reviewed the curriculum and decided that it needs to change. Certain aspects of the curriculum, particularly regarding Year 9 'taster sessions' in GCSE subjects, are not having the desired impact. Leaders recognise the need for urgent implementation of these changes for pupils' progress to improve.

Where staffing changes have been made, staff need training and professional development opportunities to fulfil their roles effectively. You have already begun to address this. Staff are positive about the future of the school and agree with the changes you have proposed. This is no small feat and is testament to the leadership you bring to the school.

External support

The trust continues to provide a range of resources and support to the school. Education consultants monitor the school and provide support to school leaders, specific subject areas and the safeguarding team. Prior to the inspection, the local authority had limited involvement in the school. The school and trust have since started to work more closely with the local authority. This has particularly supported

the school's safeguarding procedures. The school has support from other schools within the trust and is keen to develop links with other local schools outside the trust.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management board, the chief executive officer or equivalent of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bexley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jude Wilson
Her Majesty's Inspector