

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



19 February 2018

Mr Paul Cordey
Executive Principal
Robert Owen Academy
Blackfriars Street
Hereford
Herefordshire
HR4 9HS

Dear Mr Cordey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Robert Owen Academy

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 February 2018, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection carried out since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2016.

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.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is 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 board of trustees, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Herefordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hackfath

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by making sure that:
 - the school’s website, policies and procedures, including the curriculum, comply with statutory government requirements and the requirements of the school’s academy funding agreement
 - staff consistently and effectively implement the school’s policies
 - the information about pupils’ outcomes, behaviour and attendance is effectively evaluated in order to quickly identify, address and resolve pupils’ underachievement and poor behaviour and attendance
 - pupils, and students in the sixth form, have access to frequent, impartial and effective careers information, advice and guidance
 - all pupils, and students in the sixth form, have a well-developed understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and the importance of British values.
- Rapidly improve pupils’ outcomes by making sure that:
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - the most able pupils deepen their knowledge and understanding in all subjects across the school, including for students in the sixth form
 - low-attaining pupils in mathematics have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to successfully solve increasingly difficult problems
 - pupils, and students in the sixth form, are motivated and engaged in their learning and attend school regularly
 - pupils behave in line with the school’s behaviour policy and take their learning seriously.
- Improve the quality of education in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that the 16 to 19 study programmes meet statutory requirements
 - improving the learning experience for students so that they make better progress from their starting points, including in GCSE English and mathematics
 - providing non-qualification opportunities for students to develop their personal and leadership skills
 - making sure that all students have opportunities to participate in work experience.
- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by making

sure that teachers:

- accurately understand what pupils can and cannot do in order to plan learning that meets the needs of pupils and provides sufficient challenge
- consistently improve pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar in English and other subjects
- consistently develop pupils' reading and comprehension skills and encourage them to read regularly a range of fiction and non-fiction literature.

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 5 February and 6 February 2018

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, and held meetings with the executive principal and other senior leaders. Meetings were also held with trustees and members of the governing body. The inspector observed pupils' learning in lessons across a range of subjects and year groups. The executive principal accompanied the inspector on some of these visits. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons, at social times and as they moved around the site. The inspector spoke to pupils about their learning during lessons and at social times.

A range of documents was evaluated during the inspection, including the school's analysis of current pupils' attainment, progress, behaviour and attendance. Additional documentation was evaluated, for example, the school's statement of action, action plans and the school's website.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a new executive principal and two assistant principals have been appointed. The new headteacher was able to work alongside the previous headteacher prior to taking up the appointment in September 2017. The school is currently fully staffed. Additional members of the governing body have been recruited. Trustees and governors have recently convened a school improvement task force (SITF) to monitor closely the school's progress regarding the action plans created after the last inspection.

At this time, the school's future is not secure. Trustees, governors and leaders are concerned about this matter. Leaders are not able to formulate clear strategic medium- and long-term plans without a clear decision regarding the school's future operation. Despite this turbulence, staff remain fully committed to current pupils, and to ensuring the continuity of their education.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since September 2017, new leadership at the school has increased the focus on, and created a sense of urgency in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Leaders are having a positive impact on the school's overall effectiveness. They are able to demonstrate their capacity to improve the school. Leaders have successfully improved relationships between pupils and staff, raised the quality of teaching and ensured a curriculum that is increasingly fit for purpose. However, other actions to make improvements are in their early stages, and others have had an inconsistent impact.

Leaders have established routines to monitor and review the quality of teaching,

learning and assessment regularly. They use a range of evidence to make judgements, including information about pupils' progress and from visits to lessons. A formal structure to manage teachers' performance has been introduced. Staff are now much more accountable for pupils' outcomes. Leaders' evaluations demonstrate a clear improvement in the quality of teaching over time.

Leaders regularly review and made appropriate changes to key school policies, for example, those that relate to behaviour and attendance. Amendments reflect leaders' evaluations of previous practice and the information that they collect. Policies are responsive to pupils' needs and reflect the context of the school. Leaders make sure that staff are aware of their expectations and monitor how consistently policies are applied. Although there is now a more uniform approach since the last inspection, some inconsistencies in the application of school policies do remain.

Leaders have effectively addressed concerns highlighted at the last inspection about the narrowness of the curriculum pupils follow. As a result, pupils now participate in a much broader curriculum. Current pupils are studying more academic qualifications than previous pupils. Additionally, a wider range of vocational qualifications motivates and engages pupils well. Leaders also responded to concerns regarding the low level of challenge of many of the qualifications previously offered to post-16 students. Students now benefit from more vocational qualifications that provide a clear progression route for pupils from Year 11. Close and productive relationships now exist with external verifiers of vocational qualifications. As a result, students' work closely matches the requirements of these qualifications and is prepared in line with awarding body regulations.

Post-16 students benefit from opportunities to participate in weekly work-experience placements. These help to develop confidence and employability skills. Year 11 pupils who are preparing to leave the school are well supported in identifying appropriate further education or training opportunities. Staff ensure that pupils are given appropriate guidance through the application process.

Governors' response to the work of leaders is now more purposeful. The SITF monitors and reports on the impact of leaders' actions to the governing body. Governors are increasingly holding leaders to account for their work. However, minutes of governing body meetings demonstrate that their evaluations still rely too much on anecdotal evidence and their impressions of the school. Governors' skills to interpret the evidence available are improving, enabling them to fulfil this area of responsibility more effectively.

Leaders have successfully addressed issues of the non-compliance of the school's website. The level of information the school publishes has improved. The website provides more up-to-date information about the work of the school, including recent versions of school policies and news about pupils' work and achievements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Staff have established positive relationships with pupils. Staff model appropriate conduct and high levels of respect towards pupils, who respond in kind. Teachers know their pupils well, including their academic starting points, special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and their pastoral needs. Teachers use this information well to match learning tasks and questions to pupils, as well as their expectations of what pupils can achieve. However, when staff are teaching beyond their subject specialisms, pupils' starting points are used less effectively in meeting their learning needs. Pupils who have experienced difficulties in engaging in learning in the past speak positively about their time at the school. They value highly the opportunity to learn and improve their conduct at Robert Owen Academy.

The late arrival of some pupils to school does have a disruptive effect on learning, although late pupils quickly settle into class. Staff do not use consistently the school's approach to rewards and sanctions in lessons. Consequently, some pupils do not respond positively to staff expectations regarding their conduct or attitudes towards learning. For example, staff have an inconsistent approach to supporting pupils who find it challenging to maintain their concentration during lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Absence rates at the school have been among the highest nationally for some time. In 2017, rates of attendance fell further below national averages and the proportion of pupils persistently absent rose. In September 2017, leaders introduced clear and robust procedures to monitor attendance and check where pupils are when absent. Staff identify pupils whose patterns of attendance give cause for concern and implement proportionate levels of challenge and support. Positive and effective links exist with external agencies, which further supports leaders' actions in this regard. Parents are increasingly becoming involved in these processes. As a result of these actions, the overall decline in attendance has slowed this year. Post-16 students have benefited the most from these changes and their attendance has steadily improved this year. However, rates of attendance for pupils in Year 10 continue to decline. Leaders identify that improving pupils' punctuality remains a key priority to further addressing attendance.

Leaders have recently introduced individual behaviour plans for pupils. These plans identify appropriate strategies to support pupils' behaviour and maintain their engagement in learning. Leaders are confident that this approach is benefiting some pupils, although they recognise that it is having varied degrees of success overall. Changes to school rewards systems include pupils' perspectives about how best to incentivise them. The proportion of pupils who are excluded from the school has been well above the national average in recent years. Analysis of behaviour information this year demonstrates that the recent changes in managing pupils' behaviour have been positive. For example, the proportion of learning days lost to exclusion has halved since the October half term. However, exclusion rates remain too high, and this continues to be a priority for leaders.

Post-16 students now participate in a citizenship course that provides opportunities to learn about British values. Students can explore topics and broaden their understanding while relating their learning to personal experiences and perspectives. Some students enjoy the discussions in these lessons and are keen to share their opinions. However, others are less engaged and their involvement in lessons is more variable.

Outcomes for pupils

Year 11 pupils' outcomes in 2017 were lower than in the previous year, and did not meet the government's floor targets. Although pupils with low levels of prior attainment made relatively more progress from their starting points than other pupils, progress was weak for all groups of pupils. The very poor outcomes in 2017 reflected the narrowness of the curriculum that was available to pupils at this time. Leaders' analysis of monitoring information identifies that current pupils have better rates of overall progress and attainment than previous cohorts. Pupils' progress also benefits from improved teaching. For example, monitoring information demonstrates that, in mathematics, current rates of progress for Year 11 pupils is one and a half grades better than last year.

Outcomes for post-16 students in 2017 were generally positive. Students mostly completed and achieved the vocational qualifications that they opted to study. However, some students did not complete all the qualifications for which they were entered. Post-16 study programmes include timetabled sessions for students re-taking GCSE English and mathematics. Staff identify effectively the specific knowledge and skills that students need to develop. These sessions are focused on the needs of individual students. Only a small proportion of students achieve a higher grade in these important subjects, but more make improvements on their previous grades, particularly in mathematics.

External support

An external review of governance was recommended in the previous inspection report. A national leader of governance carried out this external review. The review evaluated the effectiveness of governance and identified priorities for improvement. Leaders responded well to the recommendations made by this review and produced an action plan. Subsequent review of these actions identifies that governors have more clarity of their role. The lines of accountability between trustees and governors have also improved.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding was recommended in the previous inspection. This review has not yet been carried out. Currently, the impact of how this additional funding was spent last year has not been evaluated. Leaders have a current strategy to use pupil premium funding and are aware of how their approaches benefit individual pupils. Leaders recognise that not having a

more formal and systematic analysis prevents comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the pupil premium.