

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Rowena Hillier
Principal
Staffordshire University Academy
Marston Road
Hednesford
Cannock
Staffordshire
WS12 4JH

Dear Mrs Hillier

Special measures monitoring inspection of Staffordshire University Academy

Following my visit with Mark Feldman, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 25 to 26 April 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 since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2017.

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 improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers in the strongest departments.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local academy council, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2017.

- Improve outcomes for pupils, especially lower-ability disadvantaged pupils in key stages 3 and 4, by:
 - ensuring that whole-school planning is sharply focused on effective strategies for improving the learning and progress of all pupils
 - ensuring that staff have a clear understanding of what pupils can achieve and an accurate understanding of pupils' starting points
 - addressing, as a matter of urgency, the underachievement of lower-ability pupils in both key stages 3 and 4 so that there is no repeat of the poor examination results at GCSE and A level.
- Improve quality of teaching in key stages 3 and 4 by ensuring that:
 - teachers have well-informed expectations of all pupils and do not settle for poorly presented, incomplete or superficial work in their books
 - pupils of all abilities know what they need to do to improve their work and make progress
 - learning is appropriately challenging and that slow progress and low standards of work from disadvantaged pupils are not accepted.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving the attendance of all vulnerable pupils so they do not miss learning time
 - ensuring that behaviour in lessons is good
 - improving the ways in which all pupils show respect for each other and their teachers.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - developing relationships with external partners and agencies that provide objective and accurate evaluations of standards in the school
 - improving staff training and professional development
 - ensuring that all middle leaders have a clear understanding of how pupils make progress from their different starting points
 - ensuring that all leaders have a clear understanding of assessment
 - ensuring that governors have an accurate understanding of the school's performance so they can take urgent and effective action to remedy weaknesses

- making sure the curriculum is fit for purpose and offers pupils appropriate courses that add value to their learning including in humanities, languages and creative subjects
- making sure that leaders review the impact of their choices for courses that whole year groups are required to take, to ensure that these courses help pupils in future education, employment or training.
- Improve the effectiveness of 16 to 19 programmes of study by:
 - making sure that all students following A-level courses achieve grades that reflect their abilities
 - improving the teaching of A-level courses so that academic rigour is more consistent and the highest grades are achieved.

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.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 25 April to 26 April 2018

Evidence

Inspectors assessed the impact of leaders' actions taken since the last inspection, with particular focus on the areas for improvement relating to leadership and management, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development, behaviour and welfare, and outcomes.

Meetings were held with the principal, the substantive vice-principal, other leaders and staff. The lead inspector met with five members of the local academy council (LAC) and the chief executive officer of the trust. He also had a telephone conversation with an external consultant.

The opinions of parents and carers were considered through 79 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. The lead inspector also reviewed 54 responses from the parents of Year 7 pupils to the school's questionnaire.

Inspectors observed behaviour during social time and in lessons. Formal and informal discussions took place between inspectors and pupils. Inspectors made short visits, with senior leaders, to a range of lessons in every key stage. During these visits, inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils to evaluate the quality of their learning. Inspectors also examined pupils' work in a sample of their books.

Various school documents were scrutinised, including the trust's statement of action, the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation, and minutes of meetings of the LAC. Information about safeguarding and records of pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and welfare were also analysed.

Context

Since the last inspection, the following staff have joined the school: an additional vice-principal and a seconded vice-principal; two directors of teaching and learning; two heads of year; a head of the creative faculty; a head of science; a director and a lead practitioner of mathematics; a teacher in charge of sociology/psychology; a teacher in charge of geography; three teachers of science; a part-time teacher of physical education (PE); a business manager; and an attendance intervention manager.

The vice-principal who was in post at the time of the last inspection has been seconded to another school. The following staff have left the school: an assistant principal; the head of mathematics; the head of science; and teachers of English, history, mathematics, science and PE. Two science teachers who joined the school in January 2018 left in April. Two members of staff are currently on maternity leave.

Two parent governors have joined the LAC and one governor has left the LAC since the last inspection.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leadership has been strengthened since the time of the last inspection. The vice-principal who was appointed in September 2017, the seconded vice-principal and the teaching and learning directors have enhanced leadership capacity. All senior staff are working productively with the principal to create a more positive and ambitious culture within the school.

The trust's revised statement of action is fit for purpose. The relevant, clear and specific actions are set within an appropriate and logical time frame. The statement of action clearly identifies the staff who are responsible for leading and taking actions. Success criteria, the monitoring and evaluation process, and appropriate resources are also identified. Arrangements for informing parents of the actions and taking account of their views are now included.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are using this to inform effective action towards the removal of special measures. The school's improvement plan identifies key priorities and a great deal of action has taken place to address the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection. Leaders are aware that they now need to evaluate the impact of actions more systematically, review the outcomes of this analysis and use this information to make further improvements.

The principal and vice-principal have a thorough understanding of the assessment process and they provide staff with clear information about pupils' starting points and what they can achieve. However, this is not used consistently across departments to develop effective strategies to improve the learning and progress of all pupils. There is still too much variation in the quality of teaching, the work that pupils produce and the progress pupils make in different subject areas.

Middle leadership is inconsistent. Some areas are well led, but there have been weaknesses in the leadership of mathematics and science since the last inspection. Assessment is not robust in these areas, and pupils have made slow progress in these key subjects. Senior leaders have taken action to address these leadership issues but they are yet to have a marked impact on the quality of provision.

The curriculum has improved and it is fit for purpose. Creative subjects and the humanities now have more time allocated to them in key stage 3, and more key stage 4 pupils are studying modern foreign languages than in the past. Leaders have also reviewed the impact of their choices for courses that whole year groups are required to take, to ensure that these courses help pupils in future education,

employment and training. The impact of this will be reviewed at the next monitoring inspection.

Leaders used the pupil premium review that took place in November 2017 to improve their practice. Meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils now has a much higher profile in the school, and this group of pupils benefit from a range of interventions. Teachers know which pupils in their class receive the pupil premium, and the most effective teachers adapt their approaches to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Additional resources, subsidised trips and visits, and mentoring are all used to help this group of pupils improve their outcomes. However, although there have been some improvements in progress, behaviour and attendance, disadvantaged pupils are still not making fast enough progress to attain as well as other pupils.

The provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is well led and managed. Vulnerable pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities who attend the Chase View Support Centre achieve a range of positive outcomes. This is the result of the input that they are given within this high-quality provision.

Communication with parents is improving. Parents receive regular reports about how their children are progressing and the school's website and regular newsletters keep parents up to date with developments at the school. Staff respond positively to suggestions made at the parents' forum, and many parents attend a range of events at the school. Consequently, a very large majority of parents who responded to Parent View were very positive about the school and most would recommend it to another parent.

Arrangements for safeguarding were judged to be effective at the time of the last inspection, and this aspect of the school's work continues to be well led. Robust procedures are in place, and staff are clear about their responsibilities. There is an embedded safeguarding culture in the school.

The review of governance took place in November 2017 and highlighted that members of the LAC have a broad range of skills and experience. It emphasised that there were areas for development, but that members of the LAC care passionately for the school. Since the review, those responsible for governance have taken further action to develop their practice.

Governance is improving. Members of the LAC meet regularly with the members of staff to whom they link, offer appropriate support and challenge, and hold leaders to close account for improving the school. Those responsible for governance have benefited from high-quality training from external consultants. They receive information about the school's performance from a range of sources and their meetings focus on the school's priorities. Members of the LAC now have an accurate understanding of the school's performance so that they can take

effective action to remedy weaknesses.

Staffordshire University Academy Trust is also responsible for aspects of governance. The trust provides effective support and challenge and a range of services to the school. The chief executive officer meets regularly with the principal to hold her to account, and the trust has commissioned external partners to provide reviews and support for various aspects of the school's provision. This includes governance, the use of the pupil premium, leadership and management, and teaching, learning and assessment. The trust champions staff development and offers opportunities for staff to follow fully funded Masters of Arts courses through Staffordshire University.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

As a result of effective training and the sharing of best practice, teaching is improving. There is some effective practice, particularly in the sixth form and in English, humanities, music, art, design and technology, and sport. However, teaching is weak in mathematics and science.

Where teaching is less effective, staff do not have high enough expectations of the pupils and activities do not challenge them to make good progress. The most able pupils are not directed to attempt more difficult tasks, and time is not used well to move learning on at an appropriate pace. Opportunities for extended writing are not taken as a matter of course, and staff do not set pupils challenging targets on a consistent basis. Too many pupils do not have a clear idea of how to improve their work in some subject areas.

There is considerable variation in the quality of work produced by the same pupils in different subjects. In English and humanities, pupils usually produce well-presented, good-quality work. However, this is not the case in mathematics and particularly science. Assessment and feedback are also variable across departments.

Despite this, more teachers have well-informed expectations of all pupils and do not settle for poorly presented, incomplete or superficial work in their books. Staff have secure subject knowledge, and many examples of high-quality questioning to deepen pupils' understanding were seen during the inspection. Staff and pupils enjoy positive relationships, and pupils work well together. They usually behave well in lessons and, where teaching is most effective, pupils show high levels of engagement.

The strongest teaching in the school reflects high expectations and the effective use of the range of information that is available about pupils to plan activities that move learning on at an appropriate pace. Leaders are aware that this needs to happen consistently.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The launch of the 'RESPECT Code' to set higher expectations of pupils' conduct has led to a marked improvement in pupils' behaviour. Pupils usually behave well in lessons and around the school, and incidents of inappropriate behaviour have declined considerably. Students in the sixth form are positive role models to younger pupils.

Pupils are now showing greater respect for staff and each other and, during the inspection, they were polite and considerate. They are becoming increasingly proud of their school.

Behaviour during social time is calm and orderly. Pupils walk around the school in a sensible manner and they feel safe in the school. Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare and that staff would deal effectively with any incidents of unkindness.

Exclusions are declining, but leaders are aware that they are still likely to be above the national average this year. However, the few pupils who find it more difficult to manage their own behaviour are well supported to improve their conduct. As a result, incidents of repeat exclusions are now much less common.

Current attendance is above last year's national average, and persistent absence has declined. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils have improved attendance, but disadvantaged pupils are still absent more often than other pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils in last year's Year 11 made slower progress than the national average. Pupils made very slow progress in mathematics, science, French and English. They made slower than average progress in humanities, but progress in vocational and creative subjects was faster than the national average.

In 2017, disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 made better progress than other pupils in the school but this was still slower than that of other pupils nationally. Consequently, their average attainment was more than one-and-a-half grades lower than the national average for other pupils. Disadvantaged pupils made very slow progress in mathematics, science, English and humanities. Very few disadvantaged pupils studied modern foreign languages in last year's Year 11.

Attainment of the higher grades in English and mathematics combined was much lower than the national average. Too many pupils gained a standard or strong pass in either English or mathematics but not in the other subject. Overall attainment was below the national average by half a grade.

Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities in last year's Year 11 made faster progress than other pupils with similar starting points. Low and middle prior attaining pupils and disadvantaged pupils made much faster progress than average in creative and vocational subjects. The overall attainment of low prior attaining pupils was more than half a grade higher than the national average for this group. However, middle prior attaining pupils and the most able pupils did not achieve as well as they should have done.

Current pupils are making improved progress, particularly in English and humanities, and strengths in creative and vocational subjects remain. However, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils are still not making fast enough progress, and boys are making slower progress than girls. Standards in modern foreign languages, mathematics and, particularly, science remain too low.

Outcomes for sixth-form students were below the national average in 2017. However, as a result of effective teaching and students' commitment to learning, current students are making faster progress.

External support

Leaders have developed relationships with external partners and agencies that provide objective and accurate evaluations of standards in the school. External consultants provide good-quality support for aspects of leadership and management, including governance, and analysis of pupils' academic outcomes and progress information. The company that the trust has commissioned works closely with leaders to help them develop their practice.