

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



12 October 2018

Mrs Deborah Edwards
Acting Principal
City Academy Norwich
299 Bluebell Road
Norwich
Norfolk
NR4 7LP

Dear Mrs Edwards

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to City Academy Norwich

Following my visit to your school on 28 September 2018, 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in April 2017, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- assess how its provision for disadvantaged pupils may be improved by undertaking an external review of its use of the pupil premium
- precisely evaluate the impact of the strategies put in place to improve the attendance, behaviour and achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, four subject leaders, and the chair of the trust board to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also had a telephone discussion with the chief executive officer of the Bohunt Education Trust (BET) prior to the inspection to gather information about the support provided to the school. The school's improvement plans were evaluated. I made short visits to a number of lessons with the assistant vice principal to observe pupils' learning and behaviour. I met with a group of pupils from each year group and spoke to pupils before the start of the day and at breaktime to gather their views on the school. I took the opportunity to observe pupils' behaviour in and around the school before the start of the day and at breaktime.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in staffing. After this initial high rate of turnover, staffing is now more stable. Two assistant vice principals took up their posts in 2017. In 2018, you increased the capacity of the senior leadership team through the secondment of two additional assistant vice principals with specific responsibilities for literacy and numeracy, and alternative provision within the school. You have spent much of the time since May 2017 as acting principal, due to the long-term absence of the principal. At the time of my visit, the principal was absent. Since September 2017, the school has received support from BET. Two senior leaders from BET have been seconded to the senior leadership team as executive academy leaders. In July 2018, the school left its previous sponsor and became a single academy trust. A new trust board was formed just prior to this inspection.

Main findings

Assisted by the executive academy leaders, you have introduced much needed systems and procedures to bring about improvement. Leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate and has informed suitable improvement plans that prioritise the areas for improvement identified at the most recent inspection. During a period of considerable change and uncertainty regarding sponsorship, you have also ensured that the systems and processes to keep pupils safe have remained effective.

Poor outcomes in the 2017 GCSE examinations confirmed the need to take swifter action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school. The introduction of 'red lines of teaching', which identify clearly what is expected from teachers, has focused leaders' monitoring activities on the impact teaching has on improving pupils' progress. There is now a more consistent approach to teaching, learning and assessment, which is helping to raise achievement. The provisional 2018 examination results indicate improvement. However, you and the

wider leadership team are aware that more work needs to be done so that pupils achieve as well as they should.

The culture in the school has changed. Teachers are open to developing and improving their own practice through regular training and development opportunities tailored to their individual needs. Where improvement does not occur, you act swiftly to address underperformance. Pupils that I spoke to during the inspection felt that the quality of teaching had improved across many areas. You acknowledge that some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remain, particularly where you have had difficulties in retaining or recruiting teachers. My observations of learning during the inspection confirmed this.

Raised expectations of teachers and pupils have led to an improved learning ethos and greater challenge for most pupils. The lessons I visited had a calm and purposeful atmosphere, and almost all pupils were engaged fully in learning. You have revised the system used to set targets for pupils so that these are both challenging yet achievable. Progress towards these targets is monitored to identify pupils who need extra support and to hold staff to account for pupils' outcomes. Your own checks on pupils' progress indicate that rates of progress are improving for pupils of all abilities, but that improvement is slower for the most able. This rightly remains a priority in your improvement plan.

Teachers now have more information about pupils in their classes. You have clearly raised their awareness of the need to diminish the differences in attainment and progress between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils. The provisional 2018 examination results indicate higher achievement for disadvantaged pupils, but you are aware that further improvement is required. Until recently, leaders had not ensured that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils was being used effectively. Although your plans for using this funding this year are more considered, you agree that there needs to be greater precision in the analysis of leaders' actions to improve the attendance, behaviour and outcomes of this group if the school is to increase its rate of improvement.

Actions to improve the achievement of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are more thoroughly evaluated. Leadership of this aspect of the school's work is effective. 'Pupil passports' provide teachers with the information they need to plan suitable learning and find out about how they can help pupils learn best. Actions to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are thoroughly evaluated. As a result, progress for this group is improving.

Pupils and staff told me that behaviour in the school has improved over the past year. In my observations of pupils before the start of the day and at breaktime, I saw evidence of good relationships between pupils and with adults. Pupils were polite and behaved well. Pupils say that teachers apply the revised consequences and rewards system much more consistently. As a result, the incidents where

learning is disrupted by behaviour have reduced. Leaders have considered how they respond to the challenging behaviour of a small minority of pupils. You have worked with other schools to find alternatives to fixed-term exclusions that act as a sanction, but have less of a negative impact on learning. Consequently, the number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions reduced significantly last year from previously very high levels. However, there is still a core of pupils, many of whom are disadvantaged, whose behaviour is not yet good.

Leaders have ensured that procedures to monitor and follow up pupil absence are more rigorous. You have increased your contact with parents and carers, for example when their child's absence falls below 96%, so that you can identify when additional support is needed. You have also ensured that improved and high attendance are rewarded. These actions have had a positive impact on attendance, including for disadvantaged pupils. There has been a reduction in absence and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent. However, absence and persistent absence remain too high and remain as key priorities in your improvement plan. You are particularly aware that absence is still a barrier to learning for some disadvantaged pupils that you have yet to overcome.

External support

Support from BET is effective. You and your subject leaders acknowledge how the executive academy leaders have contributed to your more focused improvement plans and led on the implementation of new actions. In addition to providing strategic leadership, they have improved staff morale and instilled a belief that pupils in the school can, and should, achieve well. Pupils told me that they are aware of the higher expectations of behaviour and achievement. BET has also provided effective support for developing subject leadership, opportunities to check the accuracy of assessments and developing teachers' longer-term plans for learning.

The newly established trust board is small but experienced. The chair is ambitious for the school and its pupils. He has already identified how he can sharpen his monitoring of progress that you are making towards your priorities for improvement.

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 Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wilson
Her Majesty's Inspector