

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr R McManus
Principal
The Skipton Academy
Gargrave Road
Skipton
North Yorkshire
BD23 1UQ

Dear Mr McManus

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Skipton Academy

Following my visit with Janet Gabanski, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 13–14 November 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in June 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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 North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Shaw
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve leadership, management and governance so that they are effective in ensuring that pupils reach higher standards and make faster progress to be the best they can, by:
 - making sure that staff at all levels are accountable for the quality of their work and the difference this makes to pupils' learning, development and achievement
 - making sure that leaders at all levels are responsible for school improvement, know their roles well, and are confident and able to promote improvements for pupils
 - putting in place a coherent and rigorous approach to improving the quality of teaching and ensuring a rapid response to the issues identified
 - establishing effective and accurate assessment, target-setting and tracking systems
 - securing pupils' good attendance and putting effective strategies in place to reduce persistent absence
 - devising and implementing a sharply focused improvement plan, setting clear timescales and checking closely the impact of actions taken
 - making sure that additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and those who need to catch up is consistently effective in helping them to make rapid progress
 - quickly developing secure and effective governance so that governors play a full and effective part in bringing about improvement.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all areas of the school, by:
 - making sure that teachers have the highest expectations, including of how pupils present and complete their work
 - ensuring that teachers take full account of the current knowledge, skills and understanding of pupils when planning lessons so that all groups are challenged and stretched to do their very best at all times
 - insisting that teachers provide work that inspires and engages all groups of pupils so that they are interested and behave well
 - using assessment information effectively to identify underachievement and taking swift and effective action to tackle it.
- Urgently improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, especially

for disadvantaged and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, by ensuring that:

- there is a rapid reduction in pupils' absence so that opportunities for learning are not missed
- pupils treat each other and adults with respect at all times
- improvements in behaviour are secured quickly to eradicate low-level disruption in class and to reduce exclusions
- pupils have further opportunities to learn about risks and how to keep themselves healthy and safe.

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

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 13 November 2018 to 14 November 2018

Evidence

During the inspection, inspectors met with the principal, other senior staff and a group of middle leaders. Inspectors met groups of pupils from different year groups. An inspector met the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust (the trust) and two trustees of the trust. A range of school documentation was scrutinised, including leaders' records and analysis of attendance, behaviour, bullying and child protection. Information relating to the monitoring of the quality of teaching was evaluated, along with details of professional development training and quality assurance processes. Minutes of meetings of the trust governance board were reviewed. Leaders' plans for improving the school, for the use of additional funding for the pupil premium and the trust's statement of action were assessed.

Inspectors visited a range of lessons across subjects and years, sometimes accompanied by leaders. Pupils' work was scrutinised during lesson visits and as part of a work sampling exercise.

Context

Since the previous special measures monitoring visit in June 2018, the regional schools commissioner's preferred multi-academy trust sponsor for the planned re-brokerage has decided not to continue with the process. The trust is now working with the regional schools commissioner to explore other possible multi-academy trust sponsors.

Four teachers joined the school in September 2018, including a newly qualified teacher. In combination with the staff who left the school at the end of the summer term 2018, the overall net staffing has reduced by one teacher.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the first monitoring visit in June 2018, the principal and other senior leaders have maintained their determination to improve pupils' outcomes and further strengthen pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. The principal has continued to take difficult decisions so that the quality of leadership and of teaching continues to rise.

At the time of the first monitoring visit, school leaders were making effective use of external support provided by school improvement partners. This support has been effective in growing the skills of new leaders quickly and in the improvement of teaching. Although support remains in place, there is evidence that leaders are increasingly less reliant on it.

Leaders have taken decisive action to improve the quality and effectiveness of the curriculum. As a consequence, there are signs of a more coherent and consistent approach to pupils' acquisition of new knowledge, skills and understanding. In English, for example, pupils in key stage 3 are learning the necessary building blocks of knowledge to enable them to be successful at GCSE. Pupils in different classes with different teachers are covering the same, agreed subject content. As a result, pupils' learning experiences are not dependent on the variation between teachers' approaches and interests.

The effectiveness of leaders' plans for the use of additional funding for the pupil premium has led to much improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in 2017/18 compared to previous years. Plans are specific in the actions to be taken and leaders have a clear understanding of which aspects of their plans have been the most effective. The difference between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is substantially diminished.

Middle leaders have taken greater responsibility for the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment since the previous monitoring inspection. They are currently leading various teaching projects across all subject areas. The early signs of the effect of this approach are encouraging, with greater consistency in the quality of teaching. Leaders are to evaluate fully the effect of their strategy in December 2018 and as such, it will be a focus at the next monitoring inspection.

In addition, middle leaders are more involved in the quality assurance and improvement planning processes than at the time of the first monitoring inspection. Middle leaders are much more engaged in holding teachers in their teams to account for pupils' progress than was the case previously. However, middle leaders' skills in writing appropriately fit-for-purpose plans, in response to pupils' outcomes information, are not yet fully developed. The links between middle leaders' observations of teaching and subsequent follow-up actions are a work in progress but are not yet consistent.

The responsibility for governance of the school continues to rest with the board of trustees of the multi-academy trust. They have continued to work closely with the principal in maintaining leaders' ethos and values. While there is work taking place with regard to the re-brokerage of the school, the trustees have got on with the job of supporting and challenging leaders. Link visits have taken place, with the result that governors have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Minutes of their meetings show a close attention to the detail of pupils' progress and the effect of leaders' actions.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There is a greater consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment than at the time of the first monitoring visit in June 2018, although variability remains. It is clear that leaders' actions have led to an improvement in the level of

challenge in tasks set for pupils, for example. Pupils told inspectors that the work set by teachers is generally more demanding this term than was the case previously. However, at times, work lacks challenge and pupils become less engaged in their learning.

Standards of presentation in pupils' work have strengthened since the first monitoring visit. There is much more evidence of pupils taking a pride in their work and that their attitudes to learning are improving as the result of teachers' heightened expectations. At times, for instance, pupils make their own independent notes as the teacher talks rather than just waiting to be told what to write and when.

Leaders have taken steps to improve teachers' skills in ensuring that pupils know what they need to do to improve their work. Consequently, pupils told inspectors that they are clearer on what they need to do to get better marks than previously. There is still some variability here, however, with key stage 4 pupils generally clearer on their improvement steps than key stage 3 pupils.

Across subjects and year groups, there is a more consistent level of teachers' adherence to leaders' policies around teaching, learning and assessment. Pupils recognise that teachers are now less variable in their levels of challenge; how they ensure that pupils know what to do to improve; and behaviour management. Pupils are finding this growing consistency to be helpful in supporting them to do as well as they can.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders' actions have markedly improved rates of attendance and reduced the rate of persistent absence. By the end of the academic year 2016/17, rates of absence and persistent absence were concerningly high. This was particularly the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged. At the time of the first special measures monitoring visit in June 2018, leaders had begun to get a grip of this problem.

Attendance figures for the academic year 2017/18 show an improving picture. The overall rate of attendance is better than previously, including for pupils who are disadvantaged. The rate of persistent absence reduced in 2017/18 compared to the previous year.

There are encouraging signs in this current academic year that leaders' actions have continued to have a positive effect on improving attendance and reducing persistent absence. Compared with the same period of time last year, attendance is much stronger. The overall rate is currently above the national average, including for pupils who are disadvantaged. Rates of attendance for those pupils with SEND are much better than the previous year and are closing on the national average. The rate of persistent absence has declined substantially compared to the same time

last year and is currently only slightly above the national average. The extent to which leaders' actions to, at least, maintain these improved rates of attendance will be a focus at the next monitoring visit.

Leaders have taken action to reduce the use of fixed-term exclusion. The proportion of pupils who are excluded from school for a fixed-term period has reduced from a worryingly high level, to being in line with the national average by the end of 2017/18. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged who were excluded during 2017/18 is below the national average. The exclusion of pupils with SEND was well above the national average in 2016/17 but reduced substantially in 2017/18 to below the national average. To date in the current academic year, there has been only one fixed-term exclusion. Leaders' use of fixed-term exclusion and rates of exclusion will be a focus at the next monitoring visit.

Since the first monitoring visit, leaders have taken steps to strengthen pupils' understanding of the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. Pupils are more aware of these risks than at the time of the first monitoring visit. Leaders know that there is more to do to further deepen this understanding and have plans for follow-up work with pupils for the remainder of this term. This will be a focus at the next monitoring visit.

Outcomes for pupils

Provisional information about the GCSE results in 2018 indicates that outcomes are below the national averages in English, mathematics and in subjects other than those included in the English baccalaureate (EBacc) suite of subjects. In the EBacc group of subjects of science, history, geography and modern foreign languages, provisional outcomes information suggests that progress is likely to be close to the national average.

The provisional information about outcomes in GCSEs in 2018 for pupils who are disadvantaged indicates that they made less progress than other pupils nationally. However, compared to the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in 2017, the difference between them and non-disadvantaged pupils with similar starting points has diminished substantially in 2018.

Similarly, although pupils with SEND made less progress than other pupils nationally in GCSEs in 2018, the gap between them and other pupils with the same starting points has improved by a considerable margin compared with 2017.

Leaders are confident that the provisional progress scores for the Year 11 pupils who left school in 2018 will improve notably when the final performance measures information is published. This is because a number of GCSE re-mark appeals were successful and because a 'countable' ICT qualification taken by approximately 25% of the cohort was not included in the provisional statistics. If the Department for Education accepts these amendments, then progress scores are likely to improve.

The progress of pupils currently in the school remains variable across subjects and years. However, there is evidence that the inconsistent progress is reducing as a result of leaders' continued actions to improve the quality of teaching, of standards of behaviour and of teachers' professional development.

Pupils increasingly know their target grades and how to improve their work. As a result, a growing number of pupils are making improved progress. Compared to the previous monitoring visit, a larger proportion of pupils have a clearer understanding of what to do to make their work better. There are still inconsistencies, however. Pupils in key stage 4 generally have a stronger knowledge of what they need to do to get better marks than those in key stage 3.

External support

The school continues to receive support for the strengthening of leadership and the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment, from the Northern Lights Teaching School Alliance. This support has been effective in assisting leaders with the implementation of processes to quality assure teaching and to ensure that teachers and leaders receive appropriate professional development.

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the trust has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose.