

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



28 February 2019

Ms Angela O'Rourke  
Interim Headteacher  
The Bridge School  
Sprites Lane  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
IP8 3ND

Dear Ms O'Rourke,

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Bridge School**

Following my visit with Clare Fletcher, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12-13 February 2019, 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 March 2018.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plans are fit for purpose.

The school may appoint up to two newly qualified teachers in the primary phase before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2018.**

#### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Leaders, the interim executive board (IEB) and the local authority should urgently address the significant and wide-ranging safeguarding issues in the school by:
  - improving staff recruitment procedures so that all checks are thorough and adhere to safer recruitment requirements
  - ensuring that leaders support the most vulnerable pupils in the school fully, including those involved with external agencies and children looked after
  - overhauling attendance procedures so that there are thorough checks on the safety and well-being of pupils when they are absent
  - routinely reporting to the local authority when children are missing from education
  - ensuring that all concerns identified by the local authority in October 2017 have been rectified appropriately, including health and safety checks
  - improving staff vigilance in identifying potential signs of concerns and making appropriate referrals in a timely way
  - creating a curriculum that teaches children and pupils about how to keep themselves safe, in a way that is appropriate to pupils' individual needs, ages and abilities.
- Rapidly coordinate the work between the local authority, interim leaders and the IEB to bring about urgent improvements by:
  - agreeing the coordination between the school, the IEB and the local authority to ensure that the school urgently gets the resources and support that it requires
  - creating clarity about the roles, responsibilities, systems and procedures in all aspects of the school's work, including teaching, achievement, behaviour, attendance and the impact of the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding
  - improving the learning environment for children and pupils throughout the school, especially addressing the serious inadequacies in some areas of the site
  - reviewing the school day to ensure that all pupils have full-time education
  - creating an effective curriculum for pupils so that they all receive high-quality opportunities, both within and across year groups, including in early reading

development, development of communication skills and well-thought-out trips, visits and enrichment activities

- establishing thorough reviews of pupils' wide-ranging needs so that pupils have better-quality support, including well-coordinated care plans for pupils with multi-agency support and complex needs, and good-quality education, health and care plans (EHCPs).
- Address the weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment and achievement, including the sixth form and early years, by:
  - establishing an accurate assessment system that reviews pupils' progress from their varied starting points
  - planning work over time that engages pupils and ensures that they make acceptable progress
  - raising staff expectations about what pupils can achieve
  - developing staff training so that adults can support pupils' specific special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including pupils' communication, reading, personal care and independent living skills
  - ensuring that learning environments are clean, well-kept and support pupils' learning and development, including the use of appropriate resources, outdoor space and displays.
- Urgently ensure that pupils' behaviour and welfare needs in all year groups are being met by:
  - training staff to be confident in using strategies that better meet the specific behavioural needs of children and pupils, so that pupils' poor behaviour is addressed appropriately
  - ensuring that any use of physical restraint and behaviour strategies is appropriate, well recorded and reviewed routinely
  - establishing better support for young people to meet their personal care needs throughout the school day, including the development of skills that will support them in becoming as independent as possible in the future
  - developing social times such as lunch and breaktimes to support pupils to understand and engage in positive social interaction with one another.

An external review of the use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

**The areas for improvement identified during the no formal designation inspection that took place in September 2018.**

**Priorities for further improvement**

- Leaders, including the IEB, must ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fully secure and effective, including the single central record of employment checks.
- Ensure that all staff use the revised procedures for raising concerns about child protection consistently.
- Ensure that the new procedures for managing behaviour and promoting attendance are monitored closely in order to check the impact they are having and to take appropriate action.
- Accelerate the work to improve the quality of EHCPs for individual pupils.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 to 13 February 2019**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised a wide range of documents and met with the interim headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, staff and a group of pupils. Meetings were also held with the chair and members of the IEB, the chief executive officer of the incoming academy trust, the Unity Schools Partnership, and representatives of the local authority.

Parents' views were considered from 15 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors held informal conversations with parents at the start of the school day.

Inspectors observed pupils around the school and at breaktimes. The quality of education over time was considered through observing pupils learning in all areas of the school and through the work in their books.

In this first visit, inspectors focused on how well leaders and managers are addressing the areas for improvement identified in the March 2018 and the September 2018 inspections. The effectiveness of safeguarding was considered. The inspectors looked carefully at the strength of the plans to improve the school and the actions taken so far.

### **Context**

Since the March 2018 inspection, there have been several significant changes to the leadership team. The interim headteacher left together with other senior leaders. In the autumn term, the deputy headteacher, who was appointed in January 2018 took on the role of the current interim headteacher. This has brought stability to the leadership.

Equally, there has been a significant change in the organisational structure of the wider leadership team. Currently there are two interim deputy headteachers and a number of middle leaders now in the team who have been appointed from within the existing staff. All appointments are temporary at this time, because the school is due to become a sponsored academy on 1 June 2019, joining the Unity Schools Partnership, which will change its status.

The IEB continues to effectively challenge and support school leaders. External support is provided by the local authority. Additional support from a behaviour team which is located at the school is also in place.

For this academic year, there is no sixth-form provision at the school. The relocation of the nursery provision to a local school has been recently agreed and will take

place from September 2019.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The impact of the large number of external and interim senior posts initially slowed the progress made since March 2018. Further chronic staff absences hampered the establishment of training and development in the early stages. The leadership did not stabilise until the current headteacher took up her promotion from deputy headteacher in the autumn term.

The headteacher has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses. She has a team of leaders who share her passion and determination for pupils at the Bridge School to be safe, well cared for and well educated. As a result, the rate of progress is accelerating apace, staff absences are reducing, and processes and procedures are becoming more established and effective. Most notable is the progress leaders have made in safeguarding and behaviour management.

Since the autumn term 2018, leaders at all levels have wasted no time in ensuring that their actions make a difference to the welfare and behaviour of children and pupils. The involvement in and dedication of the current leadership for the school to improve is very evident. They are ensuring that previous inadequacies are being systematically dealt with and eradicated. Leaders have successfully stemmed further decline.

Leaders have suitable action plans based on the areas for improvement identified in the March 2018 inspection. These plans cover the aspects that most need to improve and include realistic steps against which to judge progress. There is evidence of progress against the delivery of leaders' plans. A good example of this is the way that the provision in the early years continues to change and develop. Teams in Reception and Year 1 now work closely together to plan a curriculum that ensures that children's needs are more closely met. While still in their early stages, learning activities are becoming more interesting and purposeful.

Members of the IEB appreciate the positive relationship they have with the local authority and the additional support provided. The IEB visits the school regularly to evaluate the progress leaders are making against their action plans. The IEB is ably led by a very experienced chair who has established clear roles and responsibilities. The IEB has an accurate view of the journey of improvement so far and a relentless commitment to improving the standard of education.

The numbers of pupils attending the school has not changed significantly. The IEB has worked effectively to improve communication with parents and to involve parents in the journey of improvement. Through the weekly newsletters, the chair of the IEB ensures that parents are kept up to date with the progress being made. This is proving effective. Parents spoken with were happy with the changes they can see especially with the behaviour and the calmness at the start of the school

day. One comment made echoed the sentiment of others; 'We have all been through rough times, but we have turned a corner.'

An external review of the effective use of pupil premium was carried out in May 2018. The IEB and leaders have responded appropriately to the findings and changed the way funds are allocated. Pupils now have regular access to a wide range of enrichment activities, such as horse-riding, music therapy, aromatherapy, dance, drama and art therapies. Very recently, new swimming instructors have been appointed. During the inspection, pupils were seen enjoying being carefully instructed and helped to build their confidence safely in the pool.

Leaders' reviews of pupils' education, health and care plans (EHCPs) remain a work in progress. This is because there are delays that are often beyond the control of the school. Internally, leaders monitor and review the plans to accurately identify pupils' needs and the support required by individuals. Leaders are working effectively with other agencies so that the outcomes for pupils and families are more effective.

With the support of the local authority, additional teams have been created to support behaviour management and child protection. In both these areas there has been significant improvement. Inadequacies identified in the previous reports in these areas have been eliminated.

However, the situation remains fragile. The school is due to go through another significant leadership change as it joins an academy trust. Leaders, the IEB, the local authority and the trust are working together to alleviate further disruption to pupils and parents. There is concerted effort by all parties to continue the journey of improvement and to ensure a smooth transition.

## **Safeguarding**

Because of the slow start, the inspection findings from September 2018 determined that safeguarding was still ineffective. Leaders had taken some effective action to provide a safe environment for pupils, but this was not well established. Since September 2018, leaders have continued to train staff effectively and ensure that systems are used consistently. Consequently, safeguarding is now effective.

The recruitment of staff and checks on their suitability to work with children are compliant. Employment records have been overhauled and are now meticulously kept. Members of the IEB and senior leaders regularly check that all procedures meet statutory safer recruitment guidelines.

There is now an established team of designated leaders who have a responsibility for child protection. Staff are more willing and likely to report any concerns they may have about a pupil's welfare. Staff spoken with were clear about the school's processes and procedures and were confident in the leadership's capacity to



respond quickly to a pupil's needs. The leadership and effective use of child protection processes and procedures are now growing strengths.

There are clear and well-established procedures for dealing with attendance issues where a pupil may be missing education. Staff are diligent in checking where pupils are if they are not in school. Leaders have ensured that processes are monitored and evaluated well.

Leaders were asked to improve the quality of education for pupils around staying safe. Inspection evidence confirms that there is now provision for helping pupils understand how to keep safe online that is appropriate for their needs. A pupil was able to explain that if he were unhappy when using the internet, he 'could tell the police, a best friend, a parent or teacher'. There is now a clear programme of study that has been written for pupils with SEND to learn about personal safety, hygiene and puberty. Currently this programme is delivered regularly from Year 7 upwards and is proving effective in helping pupils gain independent living skills.

There is still more to be done to provide suitable resources on the secondary playground. Pupils enjoy and safely use the new bicycle equipment. However, the quality of interactions between adults and pupils on the playground is not good enough and the equipment is old. The newly formed school council is in the process of asking for new and much-needed equipment for the secondary playground so that this issue can be addressed.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have been slow. Since the inspection in March 2018, staff absence has been an issue for leaders to overcome. Leaders have not shied away from tackling issues. Together with the support of the IEB, leaders are taking difficult decisions where needed when the quality of teaching and learning does not live up to high and consistent expectations. Now, the quality of teaching is starting to improve.

There has been a greater sense of urgency since September 2018. There is now clear evidence that leaders are using support and challenge provided from external advice to train staff and hold them to account for the quality of provision for all pupils. This is very evident in the primary phase of the school. Evidence from pupils' books demonstrates that pupils are receiving learning activities that are increasingly matched to their needs, age and interests.

The environment in which pupils learn is now clean, tidy and more conducive to learning. There is a growing sense of pride in the school. Staff spoken with explained that staff morale has improved and 'there is a greater sense of value'. Staff are willingly accepting the changes and can talk about the improvements easily. They welcome the training and development that is now provided. They have confidence in the leadership.

In key stage 4, pupils are now provided with a curriculum that will enable them to gain recognised, external qualifications. Staff and pupils are working carefully through the programme of study. Pupils are responding well to the higher expectations of what they can achieve.

The effective use of teaching assistants is too variable in helping pupils make better progress. Where teaching assistants are used well, they have good relationships with pupils and focus effectively on helping pupils gain relevant knowledge and skills. This is not consistent across the school.

School leaders have introduced personal learning plans (PLPs) that link to the information from a pupil's EHCP and are used by staff to design a relevant curriculum. Staff are not using the PLPs consistently or as effectively as leaders intended. This is slowing the progress in raising the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders have an accurate view and are determined to tackle weak teaching. However, work on producing an effective curriculum and adults' use of the new assessment system is in the very early stages. Leaders' plans for a curriculum that helps pupils build their communication, phonics, reading and writing skills are very new. It is too soon to evaluate the impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

There have been many improvements in the way adults manage behaviour. This has resulted in a significant reduction in incidents that require physical intervention or that escalate further. Staff are using positive approaches well. The behaviour team supports pupils, staff and families effectively.

The use of physical restraint, whether a positive touch or need for further physical intervention, is now recorded diligently. The routine use of physical intervention has stopped and staff are trained to use different and more positive strategies with pupils. Where staff are using their training consistently, then the reduction in incidents is noticeable.

Pupils' attendance and absences are accurately recorded, and systems have been improved. Staff regularly liaise with the education welfare officer to ensure that pupils attend school well and that the local authority is informed of absences. Attendance remains below the national average but is improving.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a great deal of work undertaken to ensure that pupils in key stage 4 have well-considered career transition plans. Already this year, all pupils have clear pathways to the next stage of their education that are based on an understanding of pupils' needs and interests.

The start of the school day is orderly and well resourced. Adults have clear roles and responsibilities that appear well established. Routines are followed well, and this results in pupils having a calm start to their day. This is an improvement. Pupils' safety is considered effectively, and leaders have ensured that staff are deployed well.

### **External support**

Initially the local authority was slow to provide the necessary support and advice needed by the school. Since May 2018, the local authority has offered a wide range of professional support to the school with varying degrees of success.

It has supported the IEB by providing consultancy time and advice. Those working with the school currently have a more realistic view of the journey of the school, its strengths and continued areas for improvement.

The local authority has provided suitable advice and support to leaders on many complex personnel issues. It has worked significantly with school leaders, offering advice and guidance where there have been many ongoing staff absences, for example.

Equally, the local authority has worked effectively with leaders and staff regarding behaviour and attendance of pupils. This is having a positive effect. Pupils' attendance is improving and through the work of the behaviour team, the school is a calm and welcoming place.

While the local authority action plan is fit for purpose, the indicators for completion of actions are not realistic. They have relied on the school joining an academy trust sooner than it is due to do so. Consequently, the local authority plans have not been effective in raising the quality and consistency in teaching, learning and assessment to date. The work to support the school in designing a suitable curriculum and monitor the improvements in teaching remains too variable.

The local authority remains slow in working with the school to ensure that pupils' EHCPs are appropriately signed and returned. Some EHCPs are still taking months to return to the school and families. This is an unacceptable delay in providing the essential support for pupils.

The school is due to join the Unity Schools Partnership on 1 June 2019. The trust has already started to informally work with school leaders, the IEB and the local authority to carefully manage the transition from a maintained school. Currently, the school remains fragile, with many systems and procedures that are new and not yet well established. More still needs to be achieved so that the transition from a maintained school to an academy is smooth and does not result in the quality of education deteriorating.

**Priorities for further improvement:**

- Leaders, the IEB, the local authority and the incoming academy trust work swiftly together to improve the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment and improvements are sustained.
- Use teaching assistants more effectively to improve the learning and progress opportunities for pupils.
- Ensure that new systems are firmly used and established and are based on preparing pupils well for the next stage of their education.
- Ensure that pupils are provided with a progressive curriculum in communication, phonics, reading and writing across the school.