

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Kim Cerri
Riverside Bridge School
Renwick Road
Barking
IG11 0FU

Dear Ms Cerri

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Riverside Bridge School

Following my visit to your school on 7 March 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in July 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

The visit focused on leaders' actions to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous section 5 inspection, with a particular focus on the steps that leaders and governors have taken to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the consultant headteacher, senior leaders and the chair of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan. I also reviewed the school's single central record, behaviour and restraint logs, training records, risk assessments and transition plans for Year 11 pupils. School leaders shared pupil progress records, examples of teachers' planning and accreditation pathways for key stage 4 pupils. I observed teaching and learning in 10 lessons. I also observed pupils' behaviour throughout the school day, in lessons and at breaktimes. I spoke to pupils informally about their experiences at the school and spoke to staff throughout the inspection.

Context

Since the last inspection in July 2018, changes have been made to the senior leadership team. Since September 2018, the governing body has commissioned a headteacher from a local outstanding special school to act as a consultant for two and a half days per week initially, which has now been reduced to half a day per week. Governors have also appointed two part-time interim deputy heads – one from a local authority special school and one from a secondary school within the Partnership Learning Trust – to support the acting headteacher to deliver the school's action plan. The associate headteacher at the time of the last inspection left the school in November 2018. Following his departure, governors appointed a member of the school's senior leadership team as acting headteacher.

The statement of action, drawn up by Partnership Learning Trust, was initially judged as not fit for purpose because it did not detail how parents and carers were to be informed of the school's actions. This has now been addressed, with information and meetings scheduled in November 2018. As a result, the action plan is now judged to be fit for purpose.

Leaders and governors have reviewed the school development plan regularly to ensure that it is having the desired impact on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Phase one of the plan has seen leaders focusing their attention on improving the safety of pupils. This phase was completed in the autumn term of 2018. There are clear plans in place to address the quality of teaching and learning during the spring term of 2019 ('phase two').

There has been a significant increase in the number of pupils on roll, from 98 pupils in 2018 to 135 pupils in March 2019.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders have taken urgent steps to ensure that all pupils are kept safe in school.

Since September 2018, all staff have been trained in appropriate behaviour management strategies, including the use of physical restraint. Two senior leaders are now qualified to train staff in the use of physical interventions. This ensures that all new staff can be trained promptly when they join the school. Staff use physical interventions appropriately and record incidents accurately, using the school's new monitoring systems. The physical interventions model chosen by the school focuses on reducing the need for physical restraint. The school's records show a significant decrease in the number of high-level behavioural incidents since September 2018. Observations during lessons and discussions with staff indicate that teachers and co-educators are now confident about de-escalating behaviour effectively within the classroom.

Leaders and governors have established clear behaviour principles, based on the premise that 'all behaviours convey a need'. These principles are understood and followed by staff with increasing consistency. The newly appointed behaviour team analyses behaviour records weekly in order to plan effective interventions and identify inconsistencies in practice. Examples of intervention include a redesign of classroom spaces and the use of advice from speech and language therapists to plan lessons that aid pupils' communication skills. Feedback to all staff at the start of each school day ensures that good practice is embedded. The behaviour team has also created a model that describes levels of behaviour and appropriate responses from staff. Regular training equips all staff to manage pupils' behaviour with confidence in the classroom. When high-level incidents occur, staff minimise the impact on the safety and learning of other pupils. As a result, pupils' behaviour and well-being are improving.

When pupils hurt themselves or others, staff record incidents using the school's first-aid systems. Leaders complete risk assessments, which they use to implement appropriate interventions. Examples include reviewing the individual pupil's behaviour plan and restructuring the class group. Leaders communicate well with families to ensure that they are clear about the actions the school has taken.

Leaders are vigilant in ensuring that the school site does not compromise pupils' behaviour and safety. They carry out monthly risk assessments of all areas of the building in order to identify spaces that may cause distress to pupils. For example, staggered breaktimes ensure that fewer pupils use the single staircase at the same time. During lunchtimes, all pupils have a bag with resources to distract and calm them while they wait to leave the dining room. The concerns raised in the previous inspection report about playground safety have now been addressed. The mound in the playground has been removed, fences divide the playground spaces and pupils using the trim trail are closely supervised by adults. Staff on duty organise structured activities, including parachute games, dancing and football. Playtimes are now safe and enjoyable learning experiences for most pupils.

Since September 2018, leaders have developed the use of calming rooms within every classroom. Pupils use these rooms to regulate their behaviour. The calming rooms are well resourced, with comfort objects and soft surfaces that minimise the risk of pupils hurting themselves. Pupils may be guided to these rooms or can refer themselves when they are feeling distressed. When using the room, pupils are supervised attentively by adults, who then help them return to their working area. Use of the calming room is recorded well by most staff. This enables leaders to review and amend the behaviour plan for each pupil. However, all staff need to use the school's recording systems accurately and consistently.

Since January 2019, leaders have focused their attention on improving teaching, learning and assessment across the school. With fewer behaviour incidents occurring, the teaching and learning environment in classrooms has improved. This has revealed concerns about the quality of teaching in some classes. Regular

learning walks and lesson observations have highlighted the need to implement support plans for a small number of staff. Training and mentoring programmes are in place, which are reviewed regularly. Performance management is carried out rigorously and leaders are clear about the actions they must take to ensure that high-quality teaching is delivered in all classes.

Leaders have implemented changes to the curriculum to ensure that all pupils are offered a programme that meets their needs and helps them make good progress. Changes include the introduction of a wider curriculum that develops pupils' life skills and delivers qualified courses at key stage 4. Leaders have also introduced a new reading scheme and oversee weekly lesson planning. The accuracy of teachers' assessment is moderated by leaders. Fortnightly progress monitoring meetings ensure that every pupil has a learning plan that meets their current needs. Speech and language therapists offer advice on how to manage pupils' sensory needs and develop their language and communication skills. It is too early to assess the impact of leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This should be a focus for the next monitoring visit.

Leaders have reviewed systems for ensuring that all pupils move on successfully to their next educational setting. Four out of five Year 11 pupils have now secured placements at college. During the monitoring visit, the transition plans for all Year 11 pupils were reviewed. In some cases, there were gaps in information. Leaders need to ensure that all transition plans are recorded thoroughly so that the next educational provider has all the information they need to support pupils well.

Governors hold leaders to account effectively and are committed to ensuring that there are sustainable improvements in the quality of education. They have established a post-Ofsted monitoring group, which meets monthly to review progress against targets set out in the school development plan. They provide appropriate support and challenge to leaders. An external review of the use and impact of pupil premium spending was carried out in February 2019.

Governors have commissioned long-term support from the experts currently in place so that the current pace of improvement is sustained. A newly appointed leadership team will be in place from September 2019. It will be supported by current leaders until it can demonstrate its ability to secure improvements in the areas identified in the previous inspection.

The school has been ably supported by advisers from the local authority. They attend monthly monitoring meetings and check that the school's action plan is being delivered on time and effectively. They have an accurate understanding of where the school is in its journey to improvement. They also have confidence in the governors' commissioning of external support as a vehicle for driving rapid improvement. They have identified the permanent appointment of leaders and the development of middle leaders within the school as priorities for ensuring sustained improvements.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Angela Tempany
Her Majesty's Inspector