

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Rae Cope
Ridgewood High School
Park Road West
Wollaston
Stourbridge
West Midlands
DY8 3NQ

Dear Mrs Cope

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ridgewood High School

Following my visit with Antony Edkins, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 19-20 March 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 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 February 2018. 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 school's action 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 chief executive of the Stour Vale Academy Trust (SVAT), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2018.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - setting precise criteria to judge the success of school improvement plans, including the pupil premium strategy, so that leaders and governors can identify quickly when their policies and actions are not having the intended impact
 - securing effective senior leadership and the leadership of all subject areas
 - improving governance, so that school leaders are held rigorously to account for pupils' progress and for the spending of targeted funding, including pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding
 - strengthening the curriculum to ensure that it develops pupils' deep understanding of the topics being studied.
- Improve teaching across the school, but particularly in science and French, so that all groups of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make consistently good progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers' assessments are accurate and used effectively to plan learning
 - teachers have consistently high expectations and plan lessons where learning is engaging and effective, and prepares pupils for the new and more demanding GCSEs
 - teachers deal with low-level disruption more effectively
 - teachers use information about pupils' special educational needs to ensure that teaching meets their needs
 - there is greater awareness of strategies to overcome barriers in learning for disadvantaged pupils in order to plan activities that help them to learn.
- Raise standards in pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving attendance, especially of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND
 - further developing the behaviour system to ensure that staff use it consistently and effectively within lessons
 - ensuring that all staff receive statutory safeguarding training
 - implementing a coordinated plan for teaching personal, health, social, citizenship and economic (PHSCE) education including the dangers presented by those with extreme views.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 March 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, the chief executive of SVAT and the chair of the accelerated improvement board (AIB). The lead inspector spoke over the telephone with the chair of the local governing body (LGB). Inspectors spoke with many pupils at breaktime, lunchtime and during lessons.

Context

There have been relatively few changes since the previous monitoring inspection. One teacher has left the school. An additional middle-leadership post has been created within the science department. Governors are conducting a consultation about restructuring the school's senior leadership.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have maintained the trajectory of improvement reported at the last monitoring inspection. The headteacher, well supported by senior leaders, provides strong leadership that is appreciated by pupils and staff. Senior leaders know what needs to be done and their improvement plans are detailed, clear and are proving effective. Morale continues to be good with staff committed to seeing the school improve.

SVAT has been instrumental in the school's improvement so far. Members of its AIB provide detailed scrutiny of progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection. They ensure that they are well informed. They regularly invite senior leaders to AIB meetings where the impact of improvement strategies is scrutinised. The AIB provides good support and robust challenge to leaders.

SVAT expects the AIB to cease to exist within the next 12 months, with its functions being taken over by the LGB. The LGB is relatively new, having been formed in September 2018, and several of its members have little experience of school governance. Consequently, although members of the LGB are committed and enthusiastic, they are currently not well placed to take over from the AIB. There is currently no strategic plan in place to ensure that the LGB will be ready to fulfil the role currently provided by the AIB. The review of governance recommended in the section 5 report has yet to take place. SVAT intends to carry out this review internally. Inspectors agree that this approach is appropriate because SVAT was not responsible for the weaknesses in governance identified at the section 5 inspection.

Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching in the school and this area of provision is well led. Where teaching has been weakest, leaders have provided

well-targeted training that has, in most cases, led to improvement. Fortnightly whole-school training sessions have helped to establish a common understanding of what effective teaching looks like. It has enabled senior and middle leaders to provide teachers with helpful guidance about how to make their teaching more effective. Subject-specific support in several departments is also having a positive impact on improving teaching. Staff are increasingly working together to revise schemes of work and resources, with support from school leaders and/or staff from other schools.

Historical weaknesses with the curriculum have been addressed and it is now fit for purpose. However, senior and middle leaders' plans to further develop the curriculum are currently at an early stage and there is not yet a shared view of what the school's curriculum should be aiming to achieve. In some subjects, for example science, the curriculum is not as well sequenced and resourced as it ought to be. Consequently, in some subjects the curriculum does not support teaching as well as it should.

Most middle leaders are increasingly effective, although they remain dependent on senior leaders for support and guidance. Middle leaders are enthusiastic and fully committed to being part of the school's journey of improvement. Subject leaders are taking more responsibility for improving teaching and outcomes within their departments and faculties. Heads of Year have played an important part in improving behaviour and pastoral care in the school.

Provision for pupils with SEND continues to improve. Leaders provide teachers with helpful information about pupils' needs. Many, but by no means all, teachers are now using this information well when planning lessons. Learning support assistants are used well and they provide effective support in class. Leaders check that pupils with SEND are appropriately supported in lessons and at other times.

Pastoral leadership is strong and has resulted in considerable improvement in several areas, including behaviour and pupils' attitudes to learning. Leaders use pastoral data and information well. They use the information they collect about pupils' attitudes to learning, attendance and behaviour to identify issues, patterns and trends. They then utilise this analysis to plan actions to address any issues they have found. For example, having identified a group of pupils with negative attitudes to learning, leaders then put in place a programme of support. The impact of this support has been clear, with improvement evident for each of these pupils.

Improvements in safeguarding procedures and training reported at the last monitoring inspection have been maintained. Safeguarding is an appropriately high priority for all staff. The school continues to have a high number of children looked after. These pupils continue to be well cared for. New arrangements for the oversight of these pupils, reported in the previous report, are now embedded and effective. Leaders and governors carefully monitor all aspects of the provision for these pupils.

Leaders have completed the review of the use of pupil premium, recommended at the section 5 inspection. The use of this additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils has improved. Leaders now have clear plans in place to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and positive impact is evident. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance has improved and they are making better progress because of improving teaching and better targeting of extra support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching continues to improve, but its quality remains very variable across the school. In almost all subjects there is both effective and weak practice. The section 5 inspection highlighted weakness in several subjects. Teaching in mathematics and English is largely effective. In science and French, although its quality remains variable, teaching is improving.

Most teachers have strong subject knowledge that they use well to explain new ideas and concepts. Relationships between pupils and teachers are consistently positive. Pupils mostly like and trust their teachers and are happy to ask questions and offer responses in lessons. Teachers know pupils well, including their individual needs. Pupils who spoke to inspectors were almost unanimous in their view that teaching has improved and continues to do so. They particularly value the routines that all teachers have adopted, including 'do now' activities at the start of lessons where pupils are challenged to recall recent learning.

Where weaker teaching remains, it shares some common characteristics. Teachers too often do not expect enough of pupils. Sometimes the planned learning is not sufficiently challenging given pupils' abilities. More commonly, although teachers have planned appropriate learning for pupils, they do not expect pupils to think hard or to respond to tasks in sufficient depth. For example, teachers sometimes accept very brief answers to questions and then fill in detail themselves instead of expecting pupils to provide full and detailed answers. Similarly, teachers do not consistently expect pupils to use correct, academic, subject-specific vocabulary. Some teachers are too accepting of incomplete or poorly presented written work. Inspectors saw several examples of written work that bordered on being illegible with numerous spelling and punctuation errors, almost always produced by boys.

Some planning does not ensure that pupils' learning builds in a logical sequence. Some teachers introduce new ideas or concepts without having thought about what pupils need to already know to be able to understand the new material. Pupils struggle as a result. Similarly, some teachers do not check that pupils understand what they are learning. They assume that because they have taught it, pupils understand it. When this is the case, pupils again struggle when they move on to new material that relies on that earlier learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The improvement in behaviour reported at the last monitoring inspection has continued. Most pupils behave well in class and low-level disruption of lessons continues to reduce. Pupils told inspectors that lessons are rarely disrupted by inappropriate behaviour. Better behaviour has reduced the need to sanction pupils. Consequently, the use of all sanctions, including fixed-term exclusion, has reduced and continues to do so.

The school is calm and orderly at breaktime, lunchtime and between lessons. Most pupils move around the site sensibly and arrive at lessons promptly. The school is clean, with very little litter.

Leaders' focus on promoting good relationships between pupils and staff has proved very successful. Teachers welcome pupils to lessons and encourage them to think about how they might move from being 'compliant' learners to being 'engaged' and 'determined' learners. Consequently, pupils have increasingly positive attitudes to learning. Most are keen to learn and to do well in school. At times, however, when teachers do not expect enough of pupils, teaching promotes compliance rather than engagement or determination.

Pupils feel safe in school. All pupils who spoke with inspectors confirmed this to be the case. They have confidence in staff, especially the pastoral team, to support them when problems arise. A well-planned and comprehensive PSHCE programme helps pupils to know how to keep themselves safe, for example when using social media or from people with extreme or radical views.

Attendance has fallen a little this year but remains close to the national average for secondary schools. Leaders have put in place processes and systems to promote regular attendance and there is evidence that these are proving successful. For example, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, which has been a cause for concern, has improved considerably this year.

Outcomes for pupils

Published GCSE results for 2018, although still weak, showed improvements in several areas compared to the previous year. The proportions of pupils achieving GCSE passes in English and mathematics, at grade 4 and above and at grade 5 and above, both improved by approximately 10%.

Pupils' progress in mathematics improved considerably and outcomes in science and history also improved to a lesser extent. Pupils also made better progress than previously in several other subjects, including drama, dance, food and nutrition, sociology and art. Disadvantaged pupils made much better progress than in the previous year in almost all subjects, although their outcomes still lagged behind those of other pupils in the school and nationally.

Outcomes at GCSE for several groups of pupils and subjects remained weak. Pupils with SEND made weak progress and boys' outcomes were considerably weaker than those of girls in almost all subjects. Pupils' progress in French and product design remained very weak.

Current pupils' progress is still variable but is improving as the quality of teaching improves. For example, many pupils are now making good progress in English and mathematics. Outcomes in science and French remain a concern, but even here there are signs of improvement.

External support

SVAT continues to provide and commission a range of effective support, both from within the trust and from other schools. Subject-specific support has been provided for science, languages, English and mathematics. It is contributing well to the improvement in each of these subjects.