

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



1 May 2019

Rowena Hillier
Principal
Staffordshire University Academy
Marston Road
Hednesford
Cannock
Staffordshire
WS12 4JH

Dear Mrs Hillier

Special measures monitoring inspection of Staffordshire University Academy

Following my visit with Mark Feldman, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 9 and 10 April 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 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 school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve outcomes for pupils, especially lower-ability, disadvantaged pupils in key stages 3 and 4, by:
 - ensuring that whole-school planning is sharply focused on effective strategies for improving the learning and progress of all pupils
 - ensuring that staff have a clear understanding of what pupils can achieve and an accurate understanding of pupils' starting points
 - addressing, as a matter of urgency, the underachievement of lower-ability pupils in both key stages 3 and 4 so that there is no repeat of the poor examination results at GCSE and A level.
- Improve quality of teaching in key stages 3 and 4 by ensuring that:
 - teachers have well-informed expectations of all pupils and do not settle for poorly presented, incomplete or superficial work in their books
 - pupils of all abilities know what they need to do to improve their work and make progress
 - learning is appropriately challenging and that slow progress and low standards of work from disadvantaged pupils are not accepted.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving the attendance of all vulnerable pupils so they do not miss learning time
 - ensuring that behaviour in lessons is good
 - improving the ways in which all pupils show respect for each other and their teachers.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - developing relationships with external partners and agencies that provide objective and accurate evaluations of standards in the school
 - improving staff training and professional development
 - ensuring that all middle leaders have a clear understanding of how pupils make progress from their different starting points
 - ensuring that all leaders have a clear understanding of assessment
 - ensuring that governors have an accurate understanding of the school's performance so they can take urgent and effective action to remedy weaknesses

- making sure the curriculum is fit for purpose and offers pupils appropriate courses that add value to their learning including in humanities, languages and creative subjects
- making sure that leaders review the impact of their choices for courses that whole year groups are required to take, to ensure that these courses help pupils in future education, employment or training.
- Improve the effectiveness of 16 to 19 programmes of study by:
 - making sure that all students following A-level courses achieve grades that reflect their abilities
 - improving the teaching of A-level courses so that academic rigour is more consistent and the highest grades are achieved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 9 April 2019 to 10 April 2019

Evidence

Inspectors assessed the impact of leaders' actions taken since the last monitoring inspection.

Meetings were held with the principal, the vice-principal, the assistant principals, other leaders and staff. The lead inspector met with four members of the local academy council (LAC), including the chair and the vice-chair, and the chief executive officer of the trust.

The opinions of parents were considered through 141 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the school's own analysis of parental views.

Inspectors made short visits, with senior leaders, to a range of lessons in every key stage. Inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils formally and informally. They also observed behaviour in lessons and during social time.

Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's improvement plans and minutes of meetings of the LAC and the board of trustees. Information about safeguarding and pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and welfare were also analysed.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, an assistant principal has left, and a seconded assistant principal has returned to her substantive post in the school. The director of humanities and the director of engagement are currently seconded assistant principals.

A teacher of mathematics, a teacher of science, three temporary teachers and four members of support staff have joined the school. The head of sixth form and a teaching assistant have left and a teaching assistant apprentice has been promoted to the role of student support officer.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and managers are using their clear understanding of the quality of education that they provide, to inform strategies to improve the school further. Leaders have taken action to address all the areas for improvement identified at the time of the inspection in 2017. Consequently, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance have all improved. Leadership and management, including governance, are stronger and the sixth-form provision is now improving in line with the rest of the school.

The principal and vice-principal have high expectations and they have raised aspirations within a positive and inclusive culture. Leadership is developing at all levels and the extended leadership team have continued to improve the school. Developments that were relatively new at the time of the previous monitoring inspection are now more firmly embedded. For example, the broad and balanced curriculum is delivered more effectively than it was at the time of the last visit.

Detailed plans are in place to make further improvements to the curriculum. Led by one of the assistant principals, subject leaders have produced clear outlines of how they will deliver activities that are designed to increase knowledge and develop a deep love of learning. The revised curriculum will be implemented in September 2019.

The school's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) strategy is based on a sound rationale. It focuses on developing the curriculum and improving pupils' reading, writing and communication, achievement and attendance. Pupils with SEND continue to make improved progress and their overall attendance is better than at the time of the last monitoring visit. However, the proportion of pupils with SEND who are excluded is still too high.

Year 7 catch-up funding is now used more effectively to improve standards in mathematics. Effective interventions are helping targeted pupils make substantial gains in their understanding of English and mathematics.

The pupil premium review that took place in November 2018 indicates that leaders acted on the recommendations of the review that took place in 2017. Leaders have continued to provide opportunities for disadvantaged pupils to benefit from a range of cultural experiences. Strategies that are in place are also helping this group of pupils improve their progress, attendance and behaviour. However, fewer disadvantaged pupils reach the expected standards of attainment than other pupils.

Staff and governors continue to work well with parents. A large majority of parents who responded to Parent View would recommend the school, and the school's parental questionnaire indicates high levels of parental satisfaction.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Staff receive focused child-protection training, paired with regular updates, so that they are aware of pertinent issues, including local, regional and national priorities such as child sexual exploitation. Clear systems for reporting concerns are in place and staff work well with each other, families and outside agencies to help to keep pupils safe.

Governance is effective. Members of the LAC know the school's strengths and weaknesses and they offer appropriate support and challenge to school leaders. Staffordshire University Academy Trust also holds leaders and members of the LAC to close account.

The trust has continued to provide a range of services and staff development opportunities. It has also commissioned high-quality, external support to improve the school further.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching has continued to improve. Regular monitoring and feedback, coupled with targeted professional development opportunities, are helping staff to improve their practice.

Lessons take place in a positive climate for learning. Staff and pupils enjoy productive relationships that are used to help pupils to learn. Planning has improved, and staff apply their strong subject knowledge more effectively. Targeted questions and carefully selected resources are deployed more consistently. Teaching remains strong in English and vocational areas and good practice is now evident across the curriculum.

When teaching is most effective, staff plan to meet the needs of groups of pupils with different starting points. The most able pupils are challenged to develop a deep understanding of concepts and pupils with SEND are well supported to make good progress. Teaching assistants are deployed more effectively than at the time of the previous monitoring inspection.

Staff now use the school's marking policy more consistently and the quality of feedback has improved. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to write at length in a range of subjects, including mathematics, science, history and geography.

Some inconsistencies remain. For example, teaching in mathematics has not improved as quickly as in other areas and there are still weaknesses in other subjects. When teaching is less effective, expectations are not high enough and pupils are not challenged to develop their knowledge and skills. Strategies to ensure that the most able pupils consistently reach the highest standards are not yet fully embedded.

Leaders have taken effective action to improve the accuracy of assessment information. Staff have received additional training and regularly check the outcomes of their assessments with each other, teachers from other schools and examination boards. Leaders have continued to monitor the accuracy of assessment information closely.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour has continued to improve. Pupils behave well in class and during social time and the number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour have reduced. Staff are taking more responsibility for managing pupils' behaviour and pupils are responding well to higher expectations of their conduct.

Pupils feel safe in school and they report that bullying is rare. They remain confident that staff would help them resolve any issues should they arise. Fixed-term exclusions have declined but the proportion of permanent exclusions has remained well above the national averages. A high proportion of pupils with SEND are excluded from school.

Attendance has continued to improve, and persistent absence has declined. Pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils and girls all have better attendance than at the time of the time of the previous monitoring inspection.

The 'form tutor first' approach is now more embedded. Consequently, most staff are taking full responsibility for following up issues related to attendance, behaviour and personal development.

Outcomes for pupils

Current pupils are making better progress than previous cohorts. The school's analysis of progress and attainment information indicates that the current Year 11 are in a better position than last year's Year 11 were at the same point. Strengths in English and vocational subjects have been maintained and there is evidence of some improvement in mathematics, science and humanities.

Internal analysis indicates that pupils in Year 10 are in a stronger position than the current Year 11 were last year. Key stage 3 pupils are also reaching higher standards than previous cohorts. However, although improving, leaders have correctly identified further improving the progress of pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils as key areas for development.

16 to 19 study programmes

Sixth-form provision has improved since the last monitoring inspection. There is a more purposeful atmosphere in the sixth-form area. Students are smartly dressed and act as positive role models for younger pupils. Strengths that were identified at the time of the previous monitoring visit have been maintained and effective action has been taken to address weaker areas.

As a result of improved quality assurance processes and targeted professional development, the quality of teaching is more consistent. The examples of high-quality practice that were seen previously are now happening more regularly. As a matter of course, staff are using the techniques deployed elsewhere in the school to promote learning. As a result of greater academic rigour and improved student engagement, leaders are confidently predicting better outcomes in the summer of 2019.

External support

The trust has continued to commission high-quality support and challenge from a

company of external consultants. This has helped leaders to develop improvement planning and refine their use of the pupil premium. The company has also provided considerable support to the director of science to improve this subject area.

School leaders and staff receive tailored support from other schools. This has given staff access to strong practice and helped them to assess pupils' work more accurately.