

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 Natasha Lloyd, Ofsted Inspector, and Rob Steed, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 25–26 June 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 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.

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 third monitoring inspection on 25 June 2019 to 26 June 2019

Evidence

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

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, governors and trustees have completed a review of senior leadership. The school is to have a single deputy headteacher, who joins the school in September 2019. Several support staff have joined the school. The school is set to be fully staffed in September 2019.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school continues to improve in all areas. Good behaviour is now the norm across the school. Teaching continues to improve and pupils are making better progress as a result. The headteacher provides highly effective leadership. She is supported well by senior leaders. Together, they are clear about what still needs to improve and are taking effective action to address these areas.

Governance has improved strongly since the previous inspection. The LGB has grown in confidence and is now providing detailed scrutiny of key areas, including behaviour, attendance, teaching and progress. They ask challenging questions of leaders and are holding them to account well. The LGB is now well placed to take on the governance functions that have been carried out by the AIB for the last 12 months. The AIB continues to keep a close eye on the school's performance and it supports the LGB well. The LGB's improved capacity has allowed the AIB to focus some of its efforts across a wider brief, for example by scrutinising the work of middle leaders. This has strengthened leadership across the school.

Middle leaders continue to grow in confidence. Although some variability in expertise remains, they are increasingly taking responsibility for leading the development of teaching in their subjects. In several departments, staff work closely together, planning the curriculum and sharing resources.

Senior leaders have a clear vision for an inclusive curriculum that both challenges pupils and meets their needs. Historical weaknesses in the key stage 4 curriculum have been eliminated. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), experience the same broad range of subjects in key stage 3. They all benefit from an effective core curriculum supplemented by several

option subjects in key stage 4. Most middle leaders are equally clear about the aims of their subjects' curriculum. Most subjects have well-planned schemes of work that ensure that pupils' learning builds well from year to year. However, this is not the case in all subjects. For example, in science, the key stage 3 curriculum is not planned effectively. It does not prepare pupils well for GCSEs in science subjects.

Senior and middle leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the school. Where it is weaker, they provide additional support and this is mostly proving successful, although some weaknesses remain. Leaders have an ambitious vision for teaching. They introduce new ideas and initiatives sensitively, conscious not to overwhelm or overload staff. Staff have responded positively and are keen to improve their practice.

Work to address weaknesses in some pupils' basic literacy skills is developing but is currently not effective across the school. Leaders are aware of this fact and have detailed plans in place, to be implemented from September 2019. Pupils do not currently have sufficient opportunities to develop their speaking and some are reluctant to speak when asked questions in class. While some pupils are keen readers, many are not. The quality of pupils' handwriting is very variable and is poor for a sizeable minority of pupils, almost entirely boys. Accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar are not always promoted well in some subjects. However, some success is evident. Pupils who join Year 7 as particularly weak readers make strong progress because of well-planned and effectively taught intervention lessons.

Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment remain unreliable. Assessments tend to be very overgenerous and then become more realistic as external examinations approach. This means that leaders cannot use assessment information to analyse trends or spot pupils who are falling behind with their work. Leaders are currently revising all the school's assessment procedures and policies.

Safeguarding policies and procedures continue to be effective. For example, procedures to recruit staff safely are understood and used appropriately.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching continues to improve and is now effective in most of the school, but some weaker areas remain. Teachers generally have high expectations of what pupils can do and set challenging work as a result. However, their expectations of the quality of work that pupils produce are more variable. Some teachers are too ready to accept insufficient or poorly presented written work, especially from boys. Many teachers now use questioning well to check on pupils' understanding. However, some still do not expect pupils to answer questions fully and they accept very brief responses to questions, filling in the detail themselves. Relationships are strong across the school. Teachers know pupils well, and pupils, for the most part, like and trust their teachers.

The teaching of English and mathematics is effective. In English, a strong team work closely together to plan the curriculum and share resources. In mathematics,

teachers use assessment well to identify and address areas where pupils are less confident. In both subjects, teachers use their good subject knowledge to explain new concepts and to provide pupils with demanding work.

Teaching remains weaker in science and French. In science, although classroom practice has improved, the curriculum is not well planned, especially in key stage 3, so topics are sometimes taught twice while others are not given sufficient time. Consequently, pupils fail to develop a sound understanding of some basic scientific ideas and teachers have to address these gaps in knowledge during key stage 4. In French, teaching sometime lacks challenge. Pupils are not consistently expected to learn important vocabulary and grammar and too many do not grasp the fundamentals of the language.

Across most other subjects teaching is effective. Where weaknesses remain, leaders are aware and taking effective action to address these.

The teaching of pupils with SEND continues to improve. At the previous monitoring inspection, it was reported that leaders were providing teachers with helpful information about pupils' needs. This continues to be the case. Now, teachers are making increasingly effective use of this information when planning lessons and activities. Many, although not all, teachers are now well aware of pupils' specific needs and they ensure that these pupils are supported in class.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Improvements in behaviour, reported in previous monitoring inspections, have been maintained. When pupils talk about what has improved, they invariably start with behaviour. Most pupils now behave well in lessons. They have good attitudes to learning and are keen to succeed. At social times, pupils behave sensibly and incidents of inappropriate behaviour are rare. The school is calm and orderly throughout the day.

Despite an improvement in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, overall attendance has fallen a little this year to be marginally below the national average. It is a key focus area for leaders and staff. Leaders employ a broad range of appropriate strategies to encourage regular attendance. They now evaluate these effectively, amending or discarding strategies that are not proving effective. Leaders are very clear about where issues remain and they are taking appropriate action.

Pupils continue to feel safe in school. All pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they feel safe and well cared for. They said that bullying is very rare. All said that there are staff in school whom they can talk to if they have any problems.

Pupils are slowly becoming prouder of their school. They are more prepared to participate in school life. For example, more pupils have been appointed as prefects for September 2019 than in any previous year. Similarly, almost one third of pupils in Year 11 are taking part in the National Citizenship Challenge over the summer

holiday.

Outcomes for pupils

The progress of current pupils is improving in almost all subjects because of better teaching. Progress is comparatively strong in several subjects, including English, mathematics, art, computing, food technology, history and sociology. It remains weaker in a few subjects, including science, French, business studies and geography. Leaders anticipate a modest improvement in GCSE outcomes in 2019. All pupils who have recently completed their GCSE examinations have successfully secured places on college courses for next year.

External support

SVAT continues to provide and commission some external support for the school, for example for science and French. Some impact is evident in improved classroom practice, but it is not yet apparent in better outcomes in these subjects.

Middle leaders in several subjects value the opportunities that SVAT provides to meet with colleagues in other schools.

As leadership capacity has improved, some support that used to be provided externally is now provided internally. For example, support for individual teachers is now provided by school staff.