

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231

[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



7 October 2019

Ms Samantha Williamson  
Principal  
Merchants' Academy  
Gatehouse Avenue  
Withywood  
Bristol  
BS13 9AJ

Dear Ms Williamson

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Merchants' Academy**

Following my visit with Jen Edwards and Julie Nash, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 24–25 September 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 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 board of trustees and the executive lead of the Venturers' Trust, a multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2017.**

- Raise standards of literacy and mathematics across all phases of the school.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels by ensuring that:
  - recent improvements to how senior and middle leaders and teachers are held to account are embedded across all parts of the school
  - assessment systems and practice enable teachers to accurately plan learning so that pupils achieve well and make good progress and guide them on how to improve
  - appropriate training is provided for teachers so that teaching improves rapidly
  - the key stage 4 curriculum meets the needs of all pupils.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment across all phases, including the sixth form, by:
  - raising expectations of what pupils can achieve
  - assessing accurately what pupils know, understand and can do and so target work that moves pupils onto the next steps in their learning
  - ensuring that teachers plan work that challenges pupils to think deeply and solve complex problems.
- Improve personal development by ensuring that:
  - pupils are better supported to develop respect and tolerance for those of different races and faiths
  - pupils are better informed about the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- Improve attendance across all year groups so that pupils attend more regularly and the number who are persistently absent falls rapidly.
- Rapidly improve leadership and provision in the early years so that children, particularly the most able, make strong progress from their starting points.

## **Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 23 to 24 September 2019**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, the head of primary and senior and middle leaders. Inspectors also had discussions with the executive lead of the Venturers' Trust, two trustees and four members of the local governance group.

Inspectors visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils. Inspectors heard pupils read.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection in February 2019, several teachers have left the school and new colleagues have joined. The number of pupils on roll has increased. The number of external consultants working with the school has reduced.

At trust level, new leaders have been appointed to support schools in the trust to improve the quality of education in English, mathematics and early years. A trust-wide coach has been appointed to support teachers to improve their practice.

### **The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection**

The quality of education continues to improve across the school. In both primary and secondary phases, curriculum plans have been carefully designed to ensure that pupils experience a wide range of subjects and topics. Teachers' expectations of what pupils should know, understand and be able to do have increased. In the secondary phase, curriculum plans are well-developed, and teachers are using them effectively in class. This is not yet the case in the primary phase. Leaders and the multi-academy trust's teaching and learning coach are working with staff to support further improvements.

Year 10 pupils are studying a broader range of subjects than has been the case in recent years. This includes vocational and technical qualifications as well as GCSEs.

At previous monitoring inspections, teachers were not adapting their teaching to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. Leaders and teachers have taken action to identify better pupils' specific needs. Leaders routinely identify ways in which teaching can be tailored to meet pupils' needs more closely. Although this is now seen in classes more commonly, it is not yet seen consistently across the school.

In the primary phase, pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 6 improved in both writing and mathematics in the previous academic year. However, the proportion of pupils

reaching the expected standard in reading fell. There is no cohesive reading strategy in the school. This means that staff do not have the structures and frameworks they need to plan. This is particularly apparent for the younger pupils. Furthermore, staff do not use their knowledge of pupils' prior learning to plan lessons well. As a result, many pupils repeat work they are already secure in for no good reason. Furthermore, there are insufficient reading resources for younger pupils. There are few non-fiction texts that relate to the topics that pupils study in the primary phase.

The inspection in September 2017 raised concerns about pupils' understanding and appreciation of different races and faiths. Leaders have continued to improve this aspect of the school's work. Changes to the key stage 3 curriculum have ensured that pupils have regular teaching in religious education and personal, social and health education. This is helping pupils to have a greater understanding of different world faiths and cultures. In both phases, pupils show respect for others regardless of their heritage or beliefs. There have been no instances of racial intolerance recorded since the previous monitoring inspection.

The previous inspection also identified pupils' limited knowledge about the risks they may face from radicalisation and extremism. Again, good progress has been made in the secondary phase but there is more to do in the primary phase.

Historically, pupils did not attend school regularly. Leaders' work to improve pupils' attitudes to school and support for families is paying dividends. There are strong examples of systems being implemented that are giving families the help they need at an early stage. Consequently, attendance is improving for many pupils. However, disadvantaged pupils in both primary and secondary phases attend less frequently than their classmates. Similarly, the attendance of pupils who receive SEND support remains poor. Holidays in term-time are a significant factor in reducing attendance. Persistent absenteeism has fallen in primary but not in secondary.

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

Leaders, trustees and local governors continue to improve the quality of education and the support that pupils receive. Trustees and governors have a strong understanding of areas of weakness and make strategic decisions that are having a positive impact. Trustees have been instrumental in the reinvigoration of vocational education in key stage 4.

Both leaders and those responsible for governance are accurate in their reflections of what is going well and what needs to improve more rapidly. At all levels, staff are held to account for their work much more tightly. The leadership of reading is fragmented, and this is, in part, contributing to the weaker progress in this area.

Changes to staffing in the multi-academy trust is providing additional support to school leaders. The work of the trust's teaching and learning coach is clearly apparent in the secondary phase. Trust leaders for early years, English, mathematics

and SEND are new in post and so their work with the school is either yet to begin or is limited to an initial visit.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Leaders' work to strengthen curriculum planning in the secondary phase is ensuring that pupils know more and remember more.
- Leaders' work to improve the provision for pupils with SEND means that pupils' needs are accurately identified and teachers have the information they need to plan learning more carefully.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The school's arrangements for the teaching of reading, particularly in the early years and primary phase, are not successful. Teaching staff are not developing children's early reading skills effectively.
- Despite significant investment, pupils' attendance continues to be below the rates seen nationally. Leaders have not ensured that effective strategies are implemented consistently across the school.

### **External support**

Leaders and staff continue to benefit from external support, from trust leaders and from other trust schools. This is helping staff to develop their teaching practice and ensure that assessment is increasingly accurate.

A curriculum leader from another trust school is providing specialist support to the humanities team and is working more widely across the secondary phase to improve lesson planning. This is resulting in plans better matching pupils' needs.

The provision for pupils with SEND has improved as a result of the support provided by external consultants, who have helped leaders implement a programme to strengthen the teaching for these pupils.

Other consultants have helped develop attendance monitoring systems, have carried out reviews in behaviour and have provided some curriculum support. The principal continues to receive coaching support from another multi-academy trust.