

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231

www.gov.uk/ofsted



11 October 2019

Mrs Kate Taylor
Executive Headteacher
Delce Academy
The Tideway
Rochester
Kent
ME1 2NJ

Dear Mrs Taylor

Special measures monitoring inspection of Delce Academy

Following my visit with Teresa Davies, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 September, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2019.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local advisory committee, the chief executive officer of the Castle Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Medway. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Harry Ingham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2019

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance, by:
 - improving the trust's support and challenge for the school
 - developing the skills of the local advisory committee in holding school leaders to account
 - providing senior and middle leaders with appropriate training and ensuring that they are not distracted from work to improve the school
 - making sure that teaching, learning and assessment are monitored carefully, and that this leads to appropriate support and challenge for staff to bring about rapid and sustainable improvements
 - ensuring that the curriculum is sequenced so that pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding well across all subjects
 - improving the impact of the pupil premium spending on disadvantaged pupils' outcomes
 - improving the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
 - ensuring that staff are well trained to deal with challenging behaviour and low-level disruption and that behaviour systems are effectively used.
- Improve pupils' progress across the school, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve in each year group
 - making sure that teachers understand the steps pupils need to go through to develop and consolidate their understanding and skills in reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring that teachers can accurately assess pupils' learning and use the information to plan activities that meet pupils' needs, particularly for pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils.

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

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 September 2019

Evidence

Together with leaders, inspectors visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, groups of pupils, the vice-chair of the local advisory committee (LAC), and the chief executive officer of the Castle Trust. Inspectors scrutinised a range of the school's documents, including records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. The single central record was checked. Inspectors spoke to parents at the beginning and end of the school day. Inspectors considered the views expressed by 55 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the leadership team has been strengthened. Roles and responsibilities have been reviewed. For example, leaders have transferred the responsibilities of the head of the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND to the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). The SENCo now has a wider role within the school. The executive headteacher has ensured that the school is almost fully staffed at the start of the academic year. All classes, apart from two, now have a permanent teacher.

The Department for Education, senior leaders and the Castle Trust have begun the detailed process of arranging for the school to join a different multi-academy trust, but no firm decisions have been made yet.

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

The executive headteacher has wasted no time in taking purposeful action. She has prioritised the improvement of pupils' conduct in lessons and around school. Soon after the previous inspection, leaders arranged staff training on improving pupils' behaviour. Staff told inspectors that it helped them to put in place consistent approaches to managing pupils' behaviour across the school. Pupils now move around the school in a calm and orderly way. Pupils follow staff's instructions well, particularly at whole-school events. For example, in an assembly pupils entered the hall in silence and listened intently to the assembly leader.

Some pupils still struggle with following teachers' instructions in lessons or are confrontational towards staff. However, on the whole, pupils' conduct in lessons and attitudes towards their work is improving because teachers consistently use agreed approaches to managing pupils' behaviour.

Pupils now study a suitable range of subjects. In early years, staff have thought carefully about how and when to teach knowledge. Consequently, in early years the

curriculum is well planned. However, in key stages 1 and 2 the curriculum is not yet effective because leaders have not considered what knowledge pupils should learn and the order in which they should learn it.

The executive headteacher has begun to put improvements in place. Leaders visit lessons and look at pupils' work. This has helped leaders to work out which teachers need extra support. Leaders have taken robust action where standards are not high enough. They have also introduced new ways to check how well pupils are doing. Leaders are now able to find out which pupils have gaps in their knowledge and have begun to provide pupils with extra support if they need it. Leaders meet regularly to discuss pupils' progress.

Staff now have a better understanding of the ways that they can support pupils with SEND. The executive headteacher decided to make changes to staff job roles and responsibilities. This has enabled the SENCo to be available to help staff improve the accuracy of their assessment of pupils with SEND so that they can provide better support. Staff are beginning to support pupils with SEND more effectively. These newly strengthened ways of checking standards and supporting pupils with SEND have not yet led to improvements in these pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders now check the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils more closely. The executive headteacher has ensured that staff are increasingly aware of the school's strategy to support disadvantaged pupils. This strategy is developing. Overall, the strategy has not yet had a positive impact on disadvantaged pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. An external review of pupil premium funding has not yet taken place but is planned for next term.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

The executive headteacher is passionate about improving the school. She has worked with the LAC and the trust to put together sensible plans for improvement. Leaders are working their way through the plan's actions. Together with the LAC, leaders are making sure that the previous inspection's areas for improvement are being addressed.

LAC members have undertaken training in recent months. They now understand their roles and are better equipped to ask leaders probing questions. LAC members now challenge leaders during their visits to school and during their meetings. As a result, leaders are held to account more effectively.

Overall, staff are very positive about changes in the school since the previous inspection. They support the executive headteacher's vision of a high-quality education for pupils. All staff reported that there are now higher expectations in lessons and around school. Staff morale is improving. They told inspectors that

leaders have asked their opinions on the changes that are needed. Leaders think about staff workload when introducing new policies.

Some parents told inspectors that home–school communication has improved because leaders contact them more frequently and there are more events for them to attend. Some parents believe that leadership has also improved since the previous inspection. Leaders are developing more opportunities for parents to become involved in the school. However, many parents still have a negative view of the school and would not recommend the school to others.

Strengths in the school’s approaches to securing improvement:

- Members of the LAC and leaders are committed to ensuring that standards improve. Leaders monitor the plans for improvement well and take increasingly effective steps to ensure that all actions are on track to be completed.
- Leaders have a very good knowledge of the local area and the risks that pupils face in the local community. Leaders use this knowledge to ensure that pupils are helped by appropriate local agencies. Leaders are very diligent in following up referrals. This means that pupils receive help from external agencies when they require it.
- Leaders and staff support pupils’ personal development well. Staff arrange help for vulnerable children and their families. This is becoming increasingly effective. Staff work well with external agencies and make stringent efforts to ensure that the right help is provided when it is needed. Improved pastoral care has led to a recent reduction in fixed-term exclusions and an improvement in attendance.

Weaknesses in the school’s approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have made some improvements to the curriculum. However, many subjects in key stages 1 and 2 are not well planned. Leaders must ensure that curriculum planning takes account of what knowledge is taught and in what order so that pupils can remember more over time.
- Recent staff training has helped them to improve pupils’ behaviour. However, leaders have not yet organised or coordinated a training programme in the longer term. Leaders need to develop a well-planned training programme, particularly for subject leaders who are new to their roles.
- Leaders have not given enough priority to the development of reading in key stages 1 and 2. Leaders need to ensure that pupils develop their reading so that they achieve well. Currently, leaders’ approach to reading does not encourage older readers to read appropriately demanding texts. Pupils across the school need to develop their reading comprehension further.

