

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



13 November 2019

Mrs Amanda Ryan
Principal
Hillside High School
Breeze Hill
Bootle
Merseyside
L20 9NU

Dear Mrs Ryan

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Hillside High School

Following my visit to your school on 5 November 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 to improve the school since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in February 2018. 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 actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve pupils' progress so that it at least matches national averages, particularly in mathematics.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - sharpening the accuracy of self-evaluation, so that plans and actions to improve the school are more rigorous and effective
 - ensuring that governors consistently provide effective support for school leaders and that they challenge leaders to secure a good standard of education at the school
 - using the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities more effectively, so that pupils in these groups attend school more regularly and make progress that is in line with that of other pupils nationally.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - further reducing inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics
 - ensuring that teachers take greater care to support pupils to use correct spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - ensuring that all teachers have good knowledge of the subjects that they teach, and that they are able to assess pupils' understanding accurately
 - ensuring that pupils, especially the least and most able, are routinely set work that matches their ability, so that they make good progress.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - further improving pupils' attendance, so that it matches that of others nationally
 - supporting pupils to develop the characteristics of effective learners so that they consistently take pride in their work
 - continuing to emphasise to pupils the potential dangers of sharing information via social media sites.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to ascertain 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 second monitoring inspection on 5 November 2019

Evidence

The inspector held meetings with the principal, senior leaders, a small number of curriculum leaders and three members of the governing body, including the newly appointed chair. She also met with a trustee, the chief executive officer of Wade Deacon Trust and the secondary lead principal from the trust. She spoke with two groups of key stage 3 pupils. She visited a small number of lessons in English and mathematics with curriculum leaders. She also scrutinised a small sample of pupils' English and mathematics work. She reviewed the school's self-evaluation document and improvement development plan. The focus for this monitoring inspection was on the quality of education aspect of the education inspection framework.

Context

Following the consultation process that was happening at the time of the last monitoring inspection, there is now a new staffing structure in place. There are no new personnel at senior leadership level. However, there have been some changes to senior leaders' roles and responsibilities. For example, a different senior leader is now responsible for attendance. This September, two new English teachers and one new geography teacher joined the school. A new chair of the governing body was appointed three weeks ago.

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

The provisional results for 2019 show that the progress made by Year 11 pupils was well below average. This means that the progress that pupils make by the time that they leave school is no better than at the time of the last inspection. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) continues to give particular cause for concern. There has, however, been an improvement in pupils' attainment across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.

Over the last six months, leaders have focused their attention on ensuring that all pupils benefit from a well-planned curriculum. Senior leaders have prioritised the professional development of subject leaders. This has improved the way that subject leaders plan what pupils will learn and in what order. The ongoing coaching programme for all teachers is now more focused on developing their practice in relation to their curriculum areas. Consequently, teachers are getting better at helping pupils to know and remember more and make connections between what they already know and new ideas. Senior leaders know that they are at the early stages of this work to improve the quality of pupils' education across the curriculum. Some subjects are further on this journey than others.

Leaders have high expectations of all their pupils. The curriculum is ambitious for all pupils, including those with SEND and who are disadvantaged. This can be seen for example in the key stage 3 English curriculum, where programmes of study are based around challenging texts that pupils read in full. The breadth and depth of learning related to these texts contributes to pupils' wider personal development as well as developing their English knowledge, understanding and skills.

Senior leaders believe that more pupils are benefiting from routinely high-quality teaching than in previous years. This is supported by the views of the pupils who spoke with the inspector. However, there is still variability in how well the curriculum is being implemented across the school.

The 2019 overall attendance and persistent absence figures showed no improvement on recent years. This means that attendance has been consistently low for the last four years. Over this period, the very low attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND has been very concerning.

The current overall attendance figure is significantly higher than at the same time last year and is now in line with the national average. The current overall persistent absence figure is also much lower. However, underneath these positive headline figures there is still concern that too many disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND are not attending school regularly.

Very strong leadership of this area has led to these significant improvements. The success has come from having a clear strategic approach coupled with a detailed daily focus on individual pupils. The personalised support that vulnerable pupils receive in the nurture base is also having a very positive impact on their attendance.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Senior leaders have prioritised the professional development of all staff. Through research-informed training they have developed subject leaders' understanding of how to plan and implement a high-quality curriculum. Teachers' planning and practice is now informed by underpinning principles about how pupils learn effectively. Leaders ensure that time is given to develop teachers' expertise within curricular areas.

Staff value senior leaders' approach to professional development. The feedback in a survey at the end of last term was very positive. Teachers value leaders' collaborative and supportive approach. Staff morale continues to be high. Senior leaders have created a culture where staff see the benefit of improving their own practice. For example, half of the staff have volunteered to take part in additional external training programmes.

The inclusive culture of the school means that all pupils are supported well to

complete their programmes of study. Leaders have high ambitions for all of their pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged or with SEND.

The trust has an accurate view of the school's current strengths and weaknesses. Driving improvement at Hillside is a high priority for the trust. Senior and middle leaders in school continue to benefit from working with trust officers and leaders. This collaboration across the trust has been particularly beneficial when working on curriculum design. Trustees also recognised that school leaders needed more resources to bring about improvements to pupils' attendance.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders now understand that an ambitious, well-sequenced curriculum is the key to improving pupils' achievement.
- Leaders have prioritised the professional development of subject leaders and classroom teachers in relation to curriculum.
- Leaders' approach to bringing about improvements in the school is sharper and more coherent. This means that more pupils attend school regularly and benefit from a better quality of education.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders' actions since the time of the last full inspection have not improved the progress that pupils make by the time that they leave school. Until recently, leaders have not thought carefully enough about whether the curriculum is enabling pupils to achieve well.
- In some subjects the curriculum is not designed well enough to ensure that all pupils develop the knowledge, understanding and skills that they need to achieve well.
- There is still some variability in how effectively teachers are implementing the curriculum. This means that some pupils do not develop their knowledge and skills as well as they could, which affects the progress that they make.

External support

The support that the school is receiving comes from within the trust. Recently, the trust has joined a national programme based on peer-to-peer school support and challenge. It is too soon to know whether this will help to drive improvements at Hillside.