

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Wayne Lloyd
Executive Headteacher
Felixstowe Academy
High Street
Felixstowe
Suffolk
IP11 9QR

Dear Mr Lloyd

Special measures monitoring inspection of Felixstowe Academy

Following my visit with Lesley Daniel, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 30–31 October 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 November 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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 board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve pupils' personal development and welfare by:
 - ensuring that there are robust systems in place to deal effectively with bullying
 - promoting a culture where all pupils feel safe
 - providing timely, regular and effective instruction on the impact of all forms of bullying so that pupils are confident in reporting concerns to adults
 - ensuring that all issues of bullying are dealt with promptly and consistently, in line with clear and robust policies.
- Improve pupils' achievement by:
 - increasing the progress that disadvantaged pupils make so that they perform at least as well as all other pupils nationally
 - developing effective strategies to support pupils with SEND so that they make progress that is at least similar to all pupils nationally with the same starting points
 - ensuring that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school is consistently good and that adults have high expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - accelerating the pace of school improvement by embedding clear and systematic monitoring of the impact of leaders' work on the progress that pupils make
 - developing effective strategies to reduce rates of pupils' absence, persistent absence and fixed-term exclusions, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND
 - restoring positive relationships with parents so that they have confidence in the school's leadership.

An external review of the use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 30 October 2019 to 31 October 2019

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised documents. They met with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, senior leaders, curriculum leaders, some staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors also met with the chief executive officer of the Unity Schools Partnership trust, members of the governing body and one of the trust's curriculum leaders. In addition, inspectors considered the views of a number of parents about aspects of the school's work.

Context

The school joined the Unity Schools Partnership at the beginning of September 2019. Shortly afterwards, a new headteacher and executive headteacher joined the school. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have changed very recently, and new appointments have been made to the school's senior leadership team. The school's local governing body has been reconstituted.

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

Teaching and the curriculum have not improved rapidly enough.

Too often, pupils who need help to catch up cannot read or fully understand the text they are given. Other pupils who read fluently do not get regular opportunities to read more complex and challenging texts. Consequently, pupils are not learning new words and developing their vocabulary well enough.

Weaknesses in teachers' planning for reading impacts negatively on pupils' ability to write fluently. Pupils do not get sufficient opportunities to write at length, or too often do not complete the written tasks they are given. Although these weaknesses are evident across subjects, this is most apparent in English, where pupils often complete very little work and teachers' expectations are too low.

Too often, teachers do not ensure that pupils understand the purpose of their learning or how to complete tasks. In key stage 3, across many subjects, pupils struggle to recall basic facts, which means they cannot complete more complex tasks. This is because pupils do not routinely revisit the things that they have learned previously. Pupils' misconceptions are not identified or addressed promptly, and sometimes not at all. Too often pupils struggle, and some lose focus and engage in off-task chat or other unacceptable behaviour.

The ultimate result of these issues was another year of weak outcomes for Year 11 pupils at the school. In 2019, too few Year 11 pupils achieved as well as they should

at GCSE. Pupils' progress in most subjects was too low. Disadvantaged pupils continued to underachieve and too many were routinely absent from school.

Recently appointed leaders recognise these weaknesses in the curriculum and teaching. These leaders have started to support subject leaders in revising their curriculum plans in mathematics, modern foreign languages, geography and, to a lesser extent, science. This work remains at a very early stage.

Leaders are providing teachers with well-tailored training from trust subject experts. This is helping teachers to plan activities over a sequence of lessons so that what pupils learn builds on what they already know. Much of this work is very recent and is not yet impacting on teaching across subjects and year groups.

Leaders are now starting to identify pupils who need additional help, in order to develop a clearer understanding of why these pupils are not achieving well. However, these strategies have been introduced very recently, and it is too early to determine their impact.

The recently appointed SEND lead has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision. She is providing teachers with information about individual pupils' needs and how to meet these. The extent to which teachers work productively with teaching assistants to support pupils with SEND is very variable. SEND pupils' progress remains too uneven. The trust has planned relevant training for staff, but this has yet to take place.

The school's own information indicates that incidents of bullying have declined, and staff deal with issues more effectively. However, some pupils told inspectors that they have experienced bullying, but do not report it because they are not sure that it will be followed up. Most of the pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they often hear homophobic language being used, and that sometimes pupils use racist language towards one another. Pupils say that they rarely tell staff when this happens, and that when teachers do hear it, they do not always challenge those responsible. This means the incidence of bullying is likely to be higher than the school's records indicate. Some pupils do not think they learn enough about respecting others with different beliefs, backgrounds or lifestyles.

Pupils report that behaviour in lessons and around the school worsened over the previous academic year. The school's monitoring records support this. Senior leaders introduced a new behaviour policy very recently to tackle this. Most pupils who spoke with inspectors think that, very recently, behaviour in lessons has improved. They also report that behaviour is typically calm at social times.

Despite some recent improvements, in too many lessons, pupils call out, talk over the teacher, or chat when they should be working. This slows the pace of learning, and teachers are inconsistent in the way that they respond. In some classes, pupils can learn without disruption, but in others it is regular. A minority of pupils continue

to misbehave frequently. The numbers of fixed-term exclusions has increased sharply this term, as leaders have enforced their high expectations. Disadvantaged pupils remain over-represented in the number of pupils excluded from school.

At each of the previous monitoring inspections, it was reported that attendance was too low. This remains the case. Although there has been a slight drop in the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent, both overall and persistent absence remain too high. This is particularly true for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, and for those in Year 11.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

New leaders have maintained many of the broad strengths in safeguarding noted at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. However, disappointingly, leaders have not always meticulously followed statutory guidance when responding to the most serious safeguarding issues. Nor have leaders always liaised with external agencies precisely or routinely enough. The new trust's arrangements for monitoring safeguarding in the school lack rigour.

In other areas of leadership and management, leaders, since the previous monitoring inspection, have not maintained the pace of improvement in the school. They have not continued to address well enough the school's most urgent improvement priorities in attendance, curriculum, teaching and behaviour.

The new trust, together with a newly constituted governing body, have a clear sense of what needs to improve. Leaders and governors have set appropriate priorities and have put detailed plans in place to pursue them.

The school's senior leadership team has increased in size. Individual leaders are clear about their responsibilities. Senior leaders have high expectations. Trust subject leaders are helping to review the curriculum within each subject at key stage 3. Teachers are beginning to benefit from a range of training and support.

These changes and improvements are very recent ones. Trust representatives and governors have only started to work with the school's leaders and staff since the beginning of the academic year. Ways of working, and systems for monitoring standards, though well-considered, are not yet embedded. However, some improvements are already evident. Staff and pupils are conclusive that things are already 'much better'.

Parental views on the school remain mixed. Leaders and the trust are working to increase the extent to which they engage with parents. Parental questionnaires have been prepared and leaders have committed to discussing with parents, individually, any comments that they record on these questionnaires. Regular opportunities for parents to meet with the headteacher and other senior leaders have been put in place.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Recently appointed senior leaders are united in their determination to pursue rapid improvement. They are supporting each other well in making the necessary changes.
- Leaders, including trust leaders, recognise that improvement has been too slow. They are taking difficult decisions, when necessary, to accelerate the pace of change.
- Leaders are using expertise from other successful schools in the trust to help support staff in making the most urgent changes that are needed.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers are not ensuring that pupils with low literacy skills get the help they need to read and write fluently.
- There are too many weaknesses in the curriculum and in teaching in English. Leaders are not promoting rapid enough improvement in this subject.
- In too many subjects, the key stage 3 curriculum is not planned well enough. This slows the rate at which pupils learn new things.
- The support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is too uneven, which limits some pupils' learning.
- Pupils regularly hear racist or homophobic language. Some pupils do not report this or other forms of bullying when it happens, because they are not confident that it will be dealt with effectively.
- Leaders are not always ensuring that the most serious safeguarding incidents are responded to appropriately.

External support

Teachers and subject leaders are benefiting from support provided by curriculum experts who are not part of the trust.