

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



10 December 2019

Mr Graeme Napier
Principal
Bexleyheath Academy
Woolwich Road
Bexleyheath
Kent
DA6 7DA

Dear Mr Napier

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bexleyheath Academy

Following my visit with Jeffrey Quaye, Ofsted Inspector, and Charlotte Robinson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 26–27 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 since the school’s previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 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.

The school’s improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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 governing body, 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 Bexley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Hallett
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve outcomes by:
 - ensuring that assessment information is used to plan and meet pupils' needs, particularly the most able and those with SEND
 - allocating the pupil premium funding effectively
 - ensuring that pupils who speak English as an additional language are given the support they need to access the curriculum and make progress.
- Improve pupils' behaviour by:
 - ensuring that all staff understand and follow the systems for managing behaviour
 - raising expectations of pupils and ensuring that staff address poor behaviour consistently.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the curriculum is appropriate and meets the needs of all pupils
 - ensuring that staff understand and follow the systems to improve the quality of education in the school
 - providing staff with the right levels of support and training they need to uphold the school's policies
 - ensuring that governors analyse information, especially about the pupil premium funding, in a timely manner so that they can hold leaders to account for the performance of all groups of pupils more effectively.
- 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 funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 26 November 2019 to 27 November 2019

Evidence

We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you, the executive principal, the chair of the governing body and the national director of secondary schools, who is also a governor. We met with the head of school improvement and the lead attendance officer for Bexley. We also met with leaders responsible for special educational needs, behaviour and attendance and safeguarding. We gathered evidence about four subjects in depth. These were English, mathematics, science and history. We visited classes, looked at pupils' work, met with pupils and held discussions with teachers and subject leaders. We also visited classes in other subjects. We talked to pupils throughout the inspection.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit in April 2019, there have been several changes to the senior team. You were appointed as the new principal and took up your post in July 2019. Eight new assistant principals joined the school's senior leadership team in September 2019. Over a quarter of the teaching staff left at the end of the summer term and have been replaced. No agency teachers have worked at the school this term. Two new governors have been appointed to the governing body.

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

The quality of education is starting to improve. Curriculum plans are in place across subjects and teachers follow them. Subject plans refer to the national curriculum content and the work is pitched at a suitable level for pupils.

However, curriculum plans are not refined enough to ensure that pupils acquire sufficient subject knowledge in depth. Some plans, such as science and history, lack coherence. The order that concepts are taught in does not give pupils opportunities to embed knowledge in their long-term memory. In English, teachers introduce key stage 3 pupils to GCSE poems too early. Pupils do not have opportunities to develop a love of English literature through poems and texts that are more appropriate for their age.

The vision and aims for subjects are sometimes unclear. For example, in mathematics, senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers gave us various different interpretations of the long-term curricular goals for pupils.

Since the first monitoring visit, consistency in the way the curriculum is implemented has improved. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. Pupils said that teaching has improved and that they are achieving much more than previously.

One pupil expressed a widely held view that 'teachers know what they are doing now'.

All classes include 'do now' tasks. These are designed to help pupils remember new vocabulary and subject content. 'Do now' tasks also help pupils extend their general knowledge about the world. The tasks are starting to have an impact on what pupils know and remember. In science, pupils can remember the definition of kinetic energy and the mathematical equation. There is still some inconsistency, however, and pupils do not always complete the tasks. Pupils enjoy these and said that the tasks help them to learn.

Teachers circulate around the class well. They help individual pupils if they are stuck and challenge others to think of the next step. However, sometimes pupils who have finished sit and do nothing. Overall the range of interaction between pupils and teachers, and pupils with their peer group is limited. Teachers sometimes hesitate to develop lines of questioning or plan exciting activities for pupils. This lack of social interaction means that pupils' speaking skills are poor. Pupils often give one-word answers or use slang expressions. Some pupils found it difficult to maintain a conversation with us during the inspection.

The support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), disadvantaged pupils and pupils who speak English as an additional language has improved. These groups of pupils benefit from the calm learning ethos, improved behaviour in classes and individual attention from teachers and other adults. Teachers fully understand their responsibilities as subject teachers to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. However, training has happened only recently and a lot of the information available for teachers is too general. Teachers do not know how to address pupils' specific learning needs and adapt worksheets, resources and activities appropriately.

The school assessment system is on a six-week cycle and teachers use additional assessments to check pupils' learning. However, the cycle does not allow enough time for information to be used to address pupils' misconceptions and gaps in their knowledge. Some pupils do not complete work.

Leaders' actions to improve pupils' behaviour in classes and around the school have transformed the learning environment of the academy. Leaders relaunched the behaviour policy in September 2019. Staff and pupils understand it and it is implemented consistently.

All pupils and staff who spoke to inspectors said that behaviour had improved. There is a calm and mature learning environment in classrooms. Teachers set higher expectations and establish routines. Pupils respond well. Pupils are clear that any disruption in classes is dealt with quickly. Both dining halls are now pleasant and orderly places. Pupils are more self-aware and are learning how to manage their own behaviour. This new ethos enables pupils to study and do more work.

The school's behaviour records support the evidence that behaviour is improving. Fixed-term exclusions have dropped dramatically from the equivalent time period in 2018/19. The number of repeat exclusions is also falling.

Pupils' attendance is well below national figures and showing only the smallest improvement. Persistent absence is very high, almost double the national average. Over a fifth of pupils are persistently absent from school. Although leaders and staff in the student welfare team work tirelessly to get pupils in to school, persistent absence is not reducing. At present, the improvements in behaviour at the academy are not sufficient to encourage pupils to attend, without more opportunities for exciting learning and wider personal development.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You, the executive director and governors have an ambitious vision for the school. Staff work hard to improve pupils' experiences at the academy and leaders support staff well. However, the way leaders communicate the vision for the academy sometimes gets lost. It is not clear to what extent staff and pupils have a share in the vision for the future and can contribute to its development.

Leaders' work to improve behaviour and the implementation of the curriculum is strong and having a positive impact on pupils. Leaders' monitoring of teaching is thorough and well organised. They review curriculum plans regularly, visit classes and scrutinise pupils' work to check on the progress in subjects. Actions are followed up and reviewed. Leaders, including governors, know what is happening in classes and can evaluate it accurately.

In the first monitoring visit, the effectiveness of the governing body to scrutinise leaders' work and hold leaders to account was limited. This was because meetings and governors visits to the academy were infrequent. This has now been addressed. The number of governors days has doubled and take place once every half term. Minutes of meetings confirm that governors are monitoring pupils' attendance and achievement closely.

The leadership of the provision for SEND pupils has improved. Information about pupils' needs is well organised and is available and easily accessible for staff. Leaders monitor and review pupils' achievement. However, there is still some confusion about who is responsible for what, because the responsibility is shared across two different teams.

At present, the academy does not comply with its funding agreement in terms of the curriculum. This is because leaders have focused on ensuring that older pupils catch up and are not disadvantaged by weak teaching from previous years. Leaders have implemented an extended school day for Year 11. Year 11 pupils who spoke to us were positive about the additional classes. In Years 10 and 11 religious studies is taught through enrichment days. However, no enrichment days have taken place in

this academic year. Also, there is no core physical education (PE) for these pupils. Pupils said that they wanted PE in the curriculum. Leaders have plans to reinstate this in a limited way in the spring and summer terms and then fully from September 2020.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have secured improvements in pupils' behaviour.
- Staffing is complete and stable.
- Variation in the quality of implementation of the curriculum is reducing and there is greater consistency across subjects and classes.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Staff and pupils do not have a sense of ownership of the vision for the academy or for their subject.
- Factors which would encourage pupils to improve their attendance do not have a high enough priority.

External support

The Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) continues to provide effective support and challenge to school leaders. Trust leaders in English, mathematics and science support subject leaders in school. There is additional support from the trust for Spanish teaching in Years 10 and 11.

Since September 2019, the academy has received additional educational welfare officer time from Bexley local authority. The chief executive officer of the trust and the director of children's services for Bexley meet to provide strategic leadership and address concerns about attendance.