

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



4 March 2020

Mr Alexander George
Interim Headteacher
Falmouth School
Trescobeas Road
Falmouth
Cornwall
TR11 4LH

Dear Mr George

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Falmouth School

Following my visit to your school on 25 February 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - leaders evaluate the pattern of, and account for, the high number of pupils leaving the school before the end of Year 11, so that they understand the reasons for this and work to reduce it
 - leaders repair partnerships with external agencies, including the local authority, to ensure the well-being of pupils
 - leaders improve the quality of the relationships between themselves and parents, staff and the community
 - the trust board and governors hold leaders to account more stringently
 - leaders systematically evaluate the impact of actions they take to support pupils with SEND and other vulnerable groups
 - leaders keep a clear record of the frequency of reports of bullying so that they can evaluate the extent of these and whether these issues are resolved.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that pupils with SEND and other vulnerable groups receive the support they need to flourish.

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 first monitoring inspection on 25 February 2020

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, other school leaders, the interim chief executive officer (CEO) from the Falmouth multi-academy trust (MAT), trustees, representatives of the local governing body and pupils from the school's junior leadership team. The inspector also held telephone conversations with the chair of trustees, a representative from Cornwall local authority and a national leader of governance.

Context

There has been a significant amount of changes to the leadership of the school since the previous inspection in May 2019. The previous headteacher left the school shortly before the start of autumn term 2019. The interim headteacher was appointed at this time. The trustees of the MAT all left during summer term. Five new trustees were appointed and remain in place. The MAT has had two interim CEOs since the previous inspection. The current interim CEO took up post in November 2019. New members have joined the local governing board.

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

The school's work to tackle the areas for improvement from the previous inspection in May 2019 got off to a slow start. This was due to significant changes in leadership and governance which took until just before the start of autumn term 2019 to be resolved. The interim headteacher, since his appointment, has put in place the staffing needed. The school is now improving well, with many new initiatives beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of education and support that pupils receive.

Trustees, governors and leaders have adapted the ethos of the school that had developed at the time of the previous inspection and implemented a care, guidance and support initiative across the school. This initiative is designed to ensure that the individual needs of pupils are accurately identified and met. An area of the school called the welfare hub has been set up. This hub has a wide range of support that pupils can access whatever their need. While this initiative is in its infancy, leaders have made a positive start in ensuring that the school is far more inclusive.

Trustees and leaders have a very clear understanding of pupils that have left the school roll or have intimated that they may consider leaving. A trustee maintains a tight oversight of each of these pupils. Trustees and leaders can talk confidently about the reasons pupils have left. There are clear cases where leaders have advised parents against removing their child. As well as pupils leaving the school,

many pupils have also joined the school in-year. There is no evidence that, since September 2019, any pupil has been off-rolled.

A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) was appointed in January 2020. Although she has only been in post a very short amount of time, she has made a determined start to this vital role within the school. The SENCo has ensured that the school's record of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is accurate. Most pupils with SEND now have a personal passport. This passport is written in consultation with pupil and parents to identify each pupil's likes, worries and strategies that teachers can use to support them effectively in the classroom. Teachers have received some initial training to develop their practice to support SEND pupils, and more is planned for the future. Extra support sessions outside of the classroom are being implemented for some pupils. Plans are in place to monitor, evaluate and adapt this support regularly. Most of these initiatives are in their infancy and will need more time to embed fully.

Leaders have developed much clearer systems for dealing with any incidents of bullying. Procedures are in place to record and investigate any concerns and to ensure that there is a clear resolution. The closer monitoring of incidents allows leaders to determine if there are any patterns or trends in the incidents of bullying. The outcome of this analysis allows leaders to adapt the curriculum effectively. Through tutor time and assemblies, pupils' understanding of key relationship issues and potentially more sensitive topics are developed well.

Pupils spoke with real passion and appreciation of the changes that have taken place at Falmouth School. During the discussion with the inspector, pupils stated that they now feel listened to. They meet regularly with other pupils and leaders to give their thoughts and ideas to enable the school to continue to improve. Some pupils have received helpful training to enable them to be part of the more inclusive culture at the school to offer support to their fellow pupils. One pupil spoke for the rest when she said, 'When I came back in September, staff were smiling. I could not wait to come back the next day.'

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Following his appointment in August 2019, the interim headteacher remodelled leadership across the school and redefined leaders' roles and responsibilities. Integral to this was aligning leaders' responsibilities to fit alongside the school's new focus on care, guidance and support for pupils.

Much work has been undertaken to support staff in the classroom and to raise morale. Subject leaders are now more involved in developing the quality of teaching in the school. Leaders ensure that teachers receive developmental feedback when they have been observed in the classroom. In a recent staff survey, where around three-quarters of staff responded, over 80% indicated that they enjoyed working at the school and almost 80% said that they are proud to be a member of staff at the

school. This represents a significant improvement when compared to the staff survey carried out at the time of the last inspection.

Leaders continue to develop the quality of the curriculum offered to pupils at the school. Each subject has devised the intent for their subject and planned the knowledge that each pupil needs to learn and when. Assessment practice is being developed across the school to ensure that pupils learn the intended curriculum.

Shortly after the previous inspection, a national leader of governance (NLG) undertook a review of the effectiveness of governance at the school. This review found serious shortcomings in the effectiveness of governance. The NLG described governance as 'dysfunctional'.

Following this review, there have been changes to the make up of the local governing body including the recruitment of governors with educational experience. Governors welcome advice and support on developing their practice. During this inspection, governors spoke knowledgeably about the school's strengths and areas in need of development. Scrutiny of governors' minutes of meetings indicates that they are beginning to provide far more effective challenge and support to leaders.

All five trustees of the Falmouth MAT were appointed after the previous inspection. The chair of trustees sent a public apology to parents for the way the school had operated in the past. The new trustees are highly impressive. They articulate a very clear strategy to improve Falmouth School. They communicate a real passion and determination to ensure that the school meets the needs of the pupils and the community it serves.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Trustees, leaders and governors have set about ensuring that the school becomes more inclusive. New policies and practice are now pupil-centred and show a determination to support and meet the needs of each pupil. Most initiatives are in their infancy and it is important these new approaches fully embed across all aspects of the school's work.
- The school works far more effectively with external agencies to enable pupils to receive the help and support they need. Attendance processes have been streamlined and leaders meet regularly with the local authority's education welfare officer to support pupils to improve their attendance.
- Trustees, governors and leaders are working well to improve the perception of the school across the local community. A recent parent survey with just over 100 responses showed that almost 80% of respondents would recommend the school.

- The welfare hub has quickly been established to be the place where pupils know they can access extra support. This includes academic support but also for their social and emotional needs.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have worked through their current action plan and are writing a new one to support the school's next phase in its improvement journey. While the draft new plan considers key improvement areas and actions, the expected impact statements lack specificity. The statements, which could be successfully met as they currently stand, could be improved by being more specific about intended impact and having interim milestones so that trustees and governors can hold leaders fully to account for ongoing improvements.

External support

Relationships with external partners were fractured at the time of the last inspection. Leaders have set about rebuilding positive relationship and drawing on the expertise and support external partners can provide. Much helpful support has been accessed through the local authority, and other agencies, to evaluate many aspects of the school's work. Leaders use these evaluations well to plan, and bring about, further improvements. A local authority officer described the school's engagement with them as 'vastly improved'.