

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Jackie Nellis
Lightcliffe Academy
Stoney Lane
Lightcliffe
Halifax
West Yorkshire
HX3 8TL

Dear Mrs Nellis

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lightcliffe Academy

Following my visit with Mike Cook, Ofsted Inspector, and Lesley Powell, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 26–27 February 2020, 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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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, the regional schools commissioner and the

director of children's services for Calderdale. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Barry Found
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to increase the rates of progress for pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, boys and the most able, by:
 - ensuring that teachers use prior assessment information to plan activities that meet pupils' needs and abilities effectively
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve so that all pupils are challenged appropriately
 - identifying ways in which absent pupils can swiftly catch up on missed work when they return to school
 - introducing a school-wide approach to improving pupils' literacy skills
 - raising teachers' awareness of underperforming groups of pupils and implementing strategies to accelerate pupils' progress.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that the persistent weaknesses in the school's provision improve swiftly by ensuring that:
 - all staff consistently and effectively apply school policies
 - senior leaders, governors and trustees urgently address the weaker leadership and teaching that exist in the school
 - curriculum plans provide teachers with detailed guidance on the progression of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of subjects, particularly in key stage 3
 - additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used effectively
 - leaders have a detailed understanding of the patterns and trends of bullying so that they can pre-empt it or support vulnerable groups of pupils when required
 - trustees improve the quality of governance sufficiently so that governors have a significant impact on the overall quality of education pupils receive
 - senior leaders sustain the recent improvements in the quality of staff training.
- Improve the quality of pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - implementing strategies to improve pupils' attendance and reduce instances of persistent absenteeism effectively, particularly for disadvantaged pupils
 - reducing instances of disruptive behaviour
 - supporting pupils to be successful learners and ensuring that pupils take pride in their work.
- Improve provision in the sixth form by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently provide learning opportunities that challenge students
 - students attain highly and make stronger progress over time

- leaders evaluate and act on their findings from monitoring activities in a timely manner
- rates of retention on vocational courses improve considerably.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 26 February 2020 to 27 February 2020

Evidence

We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of teachers at different stages of their careers, and the co-chief executive officers (CEOs) of Abbey Multi Academy Trust. We also met with pupils from each year group and talked with pupils during breaks and lunchtimes.

We visited a range of lessons and activities, jointly with senior leaders.

During this second monitoring inspection, we focused on the areas for improvement linked to the quality of education, pupils' behaviour and attitudes, sixth form, leadership and management, and the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection in October 2019, there have been further changes in staffing at all levels. A new assistant principal has been appointed to lead on the development of assessment and data. In addition, a new leader of science has also been very recently appointed. The board of trustees continues to maintain the responsibility for holding the chief executives to account for the performance of the schools in the multi-academy trust.

Furthermore, several experienced school leaders from within the trust continue to be deployed at the school to support the development of teaching, learning, curriculum, assessment, and leadership and management.

The trust continues to make use of the support available from another multi-academy trust. The school has made use of this support since September 2019.

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

The quality of education

Leaders have continued to focus on developing the curriculum. They are ambitious and want pupils and students to experience learning in a logical sequence which builds upon prior learning. However, there is still much work to do in this respect.

A significant amount of work has been undertaken to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders have introduced some improvements in all subjects which are being delivered across the school. For example, the 'connect to prior learning' activities at the beginning of each lesson are helping pupils and students to recall important knowledge. Pupils are also being given opportunities to apply their

learned knowledge to complete the tasks set for them. However, these initiatives are not consistently implemented across subjects and within subjects. When they are implemented, their effectiveness varies. In some examples, the 'connect to learning' activity does not cover the essential components of knowledge which pupils require to make sense of the current learning. In other examples, pupils are engaged in applying their knowledge to challenging tasks, but the quality of pupils' work is variable. The expectations teachers have of pupils is inconsistent. Some pupils are producing high-quality work, while others are producing minimal work which is not challenged.

School and trust leaders have not been afraid to rethink their approach to planning the curriculum. Prior to the first monitoring inspection, leaders had reviewed the key stage 3 curriculum, and curriculum leaders were engaged in implementing new approaches. Senior leaders quickly realised that the changes were not meeting their aims, and hence further review and development have taken place.

In key stage 4, however, the progress made in planning the curriculum is not as extensive. The sequence of learning is not developed so that there is a clear connectivity to the order of learning in some subjects. For example, in English, mathematics and science, some work appears to be taught in disconnected units. In the least helpful examples for pupils, a topic is introduced out of context. Pupils do not have some of the important knowledge which will help them to make sense of their current learning. Despite this, pupils are more engaged in their learning in key stage 4 than was seen during the first monitoring inspection. The raised expectations of pupils' behaviour have had a positive impact on many pupils' attitudes towards their learning.

The school and trust are reviewing and developing the school's approaches to assessment. Currently, assessment is inconsistent in its effectiveness. It relies upon a combination of formative and summative assessment methods, which provide teachers and leaders with a wealth of information. However, leaders are honest in their appraisal of the use of this information. They have identified the need for curriculum leaders to take greater ownership of the assessment information so that it can be used more effectively to identify gaps in pupils' learning. Standardisation and moderation of assessment methods across the trust is helping leaders to design means of assessment in all subjects which are fit for purpose and are of most benefit to pupils and students. Leaders are also working with leaders of another trust to develop classroom assessment methods.

Students in the sixth form are also benefiting from leaders' work on developing the curriculum and assessment approaches. Leadership of the sixth form has been reviewed and has a new focus. The curriculum and its delivery are priorities for improvement. Leaders are aware that the sequence of learning and effective assessment are particularly a focus for development. Students report that they feel valued and that the school is ambitious for their success. They believe that the sixth form is a welcoming place to be, and students in the sixth form are generally positive towards their learning.

Leaders are realistic and accurate in their views regarding the work to improve the quality of education which remains to be done. They know that after a period of review and development, the next steps to ensure an improved quality of education for all pupils and students must be taken at a much faster pace.

Pupils continue to report that teaching and learning are improving. However, they do have concerns that the number of supply and cover teachers has risen in recent times.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Trustees and governors are clear on the priorities for improvement. They have established a secure basis for these improvements through the work they have overseen on establishing stability in leadership and improvements in teaching and curriculum planning. However, this has taken too long. Leaders are aware of this. Their actions and steps towards improvement are effective, but greater urgency is required so that pupils benefit from leaders' actions and plans more quickly.

The principal has continued to lead the school towards change and has done so while ensuring that the workload and work-life balance of staff are an important consideration. The school is a very different place from the one described in the inspection report of November 2018. As such, there is now an environment in which teachers can teach and pupils can learn. Senior and curriculum leaders understand that pupils' progress needs to improve with much greater momentum.

Although the behaviour of pupils has continued to improve, there is still more work to do. Leaders have been determined to adopt an approach which is steeped in the values of the school. Most pupils are responding to the new expectations and the development work the school is prepared to do with them when they do not meet these expectations. However, there are still a significant minority of pupils who disrupt learning and lack the self-regulation which is expected of them during social periods.

Pupils' attendance has neither declined nor significantly improved since the last monitoring inspection. Leaders have made several changes, however, which are an encouraging sign. The structure leaders have introduced to tutor periods at the start of the school day is a positive move. Although some pupils feel that the tutor programme needs to be refined further, they do report that it is an improvement on what has gone before. Consequently, some of those pupils who routinely arrived late for school in the past are now more inclined to arrive on time for tutor periods.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school has invested in the professional training, guidance and support required to inform the development of the curriculum. School leaders and those across the trust are further considering and developing assessment strategies which will support pupils' learning.

- Behaviour continues to improve because of the raised expectations school leaders and staff have of pupils. Higher expectations have resulted in a 'spike' in exclusions; however, leaders are determined to hold the line and work in partnership with pupils and families to improve behaviour further.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The work to improve the quality of education for pupils needs to gather more momentum. This is particularly the case in English, mathematics and science. There is now a developing culture in the school which supports learning and teaching. Planning the curriculum so that in all subjects there is a logical sequence of learning which builds upon pupils' prior knowledge is now a priority.
- Attendance has not improved or declined. However, an established attendance team is now in place and is working hard to implement the trust's tried-and-trusted methods of improving attendance. This has been a slow process and must gather momentum to have a greater positive impact.

External support

The school continues to commission the support of another multi-academy trust. Programmes of professional development and strategic support from trust leaders to facilitate the development of leadership and management and the quality of education are now under way.