

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Donna Butcher
Thornaby Academy
Baysdale Road
Thornaby
TS17 9DB

Dear Mrs Butcher,

Special measures monitoring inspection of Thornaby Academy

Following my visit 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in July 2019.

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 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 and the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Stockton-on-Tees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching so that pupils make stronger progress in their learning, especially disadvantaged pupils and those with high prior attainment, by:
 - ensuring that all staff have consistently high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve
 - making sure that teachers take account of pupils' different starting points to plan learning that meets their needs
 - ensuring that teachers check pupils' learning and address misconceptions effectively
 - making sure that teachers extend, develop and deepen pupils' learning of concepts and ideas.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - establishing a clear strategy for teaching and ensure that it is understood and implemented by all staff
 - ensuring that the school improvement plan includes precise targets for the impact of leaders' actions
 - making sure that leaders at all levels have a clear knowledge and understanding of what is working well, what is not, and what needs to be addressed to improve the school's performance
 - ensuring that strategies to improve disadvantaged pupils' progress are implemented consistently across the school by all staff
 - thoroughly evaluating the impact of spending of the pupil premium funding
 - ensuring that middle leaders develop the skills they need to effectively fulfil their roles
 - holding leaders at all levels to account for the impact of their work
 - continuing to reduce the proportion of pupils who are excluded from school.
- Urgently improve pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence, by:
 - regularly evaluating strategies to ensure that they have a positive impact on increasing levels of attendance, especially for disadvantaged pupils and girls
 - continuing to engage with families, so that they fully understand and support the school's drive to ensure that all pupils attend school as frequently as possible.

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.

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 26 to 27 February 2020

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, the deputy principal, a group of curriculum leaders, a group of teachers and a group of pupils. The inspector met with the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the Teesside Learning Trust. The inspector also met with the CEO of the Falcon Education Academies Trust. The trust is in the process of taking over the running of the academy.

Context

Since the previous inspection, an assistant principal has left the school and an associate assistant principal has been appointed to join the senior leadership team. Staffing has remained fairly stable. The academy is in the process of being re-brokered to a different multi-academy trust. A sponsor has been identified. Since January, this trust has been providing support to the school. A precise date for the school's transfer to this multi-academy trust is yet to be confirmed.

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

The quality of education

Following the last inspection, leaders have begun to improve the standard of teaching. Leaders have made clear to the staff what they expect to see in every lesson. They have provided training for teachers to help them put these non-negotiables into practice. Teachers have also been provided with a toolkit of resources and approaches to engage pupils more actively in lessons. Pupils in each year group report that the standard of teaching has improved. They like teachers using a random name generator to select pupils to answer questions. Teachers are provided with data and information on pupils' prior attainment. They are increasingly using this to plan suitably challenging learning. Since January, teachers have received much more support from subject directors from an established local trust. This support has brought fresh energy and is accelerating the pace of change. Expectations are rising. Teachers now ensure that subject knowledge is revisited every lesson. This is helping pupils to remember more. Leaders know the current Year 11 pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Much is being done to address these gaps in knowledge and to correct any misconceptions. Pupils are keen to attend extra classes after school. Some pupils are getting one-to-one tuition. This is helping pupils to prepare for GCSE examinations this summer.

The curriculum is broad and provides a good range of academic and vocational qualifications. Some recent changes have been made to the timetable. These changes are designed to address the narrowing of the key stage 3 curriculum in

some subjects. Although there is some pupil mobility, there is no evidence to indicate leaders have actively removed pupils from the school roll. Last year, almost all pupils completed their GCSE courses. There is, however, much to do to improve the quality of curriculum planning within subjects. Across most subjects, the quality of curriculum planning is underdeveloped. Topics are not always taught in the best order. In some subjects, the knowledge pupils should be taught in key stage 3 has been missed, leaving them underprepared for the challenge of studying GCSE content. Most subject plans do not set out clearly the knowledge pupils need to learn. The external support the school is receiving has begun to address these issues.

Last year, around half of pupils in Year 11 completed the suite of GCSE subjects that make up the English baccalaureate. However, weaknesses in curriculum planning and in teaching meant most pupils made poor progress in these subjects. Leaders have removed the requirement for all pupils to study a modern foreign language. As a result, only 13% of pupils in the current Year 11 and Year 10 are studying the English baccalaureate. This is well below the government's expectation and reflects a lack of ambition.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes

The principal describes the autumn term as 'challenging'. The school continued to experience some low-level disruption to lessons from a minority of pupils. However, a project to improve the management of behaviour has improved the situation. Teachers are now more adept at managing the climate for learning in classrooms. The vast majority of pupils now conduct themselves well in lessons. They respond well when lessons are engaging, and activities capture their interest. Most show positive attitudes. A small minority continue to challenge the school's rules. Since January, better behaviour management has seen a significant reduction in the number of pupils receiving fixed-term exclusions.

The level of absence remains a considerable barrier to pupils' achievement. The overall level of attendance for the year to date is the same as it was last year. It remains below the national average for similar schools. Since September 2019, over a quarter of pupils have missed at least one day of school each fortnight. Consequently, leaders have increased the level of staffing within the attendance team. The team is also being supported by an experienced colleague from another trust. There are some signs their actions are making a difference. The trend in attendance is improving. Overall attendance was 2% higher in the second half term than in the first half term. The staff are doing much to reward and celebrate good attendance. Attendance leaders respond quickly when pupils are absent and are using fixed-penalty fines for families who persistently do not send their children to school. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved the most.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders at all levels have embraced the external support that has become available to them. Since January, they have benefited enormously from the resources and expertise the identified sponsor the Falcon Education Academies Trust (FEAT) has at its disposal. FEAT is providing much-needed impetus to improve the quality of education. It is already clear to the staff, to pupils and to parents and carers that a rapid re-brokering of the school to FEAT is urgently required. The current sponsor, the Teesside Learning Trust, endorses the transfer to the new sponsor.

Some considerable challenges remain. Senior leaders are operating with a significant budget deficit. Until recently, the staff have not received the support and development opportunities they have needed. Curriculum planning within subjects is underdeveloped. Too many pupils are still missing school regularly. Fortunately, the proposed sponsor has considerable experience of addressing challenges such as these.

Under the advice and guidance of FEAT, school leaders are checking on the quality of teaching and learning more rigorously. Teachers report getting better feedback on their performance now. The training middle leaders are getting from experienced subject directors is helping them to develop the skills they need to be effective in their roles. However, newly qualified teachers should not be appointed at this stage.

An external review of governance has been completed. The external review of the school's use of the pupil premium is yet to be done.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders are open to and are embracing the external support available to them. The pace of change has accelerated.
- The experience and resources available within FEAT are being brought to bear.
- Leaders are inclusive in approach and child centred. They have sustained a caring and safe environment for pupils to learn in.
- Behaviour has improved. The number of pupils being excluded has reduced considerably.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders remain heavily reliant on external support.
- The school's large budget deficit is a barrier to improvement.
- Attendance needs to improve more rapidly. The level of persistent absence is undermining efforts to improve the quality of education.

External support

The Teesside Learning Trust has little or no capacity to support the school. The proposed sponsor has been proactively supporting the school since January. This support is of good quality and is being carefully targeted where it is most needed.