

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



27 July 2021

Claire Jaques
Executive Headteacher
Richard De Clare Community Academy
Parsonage Street
Halstead
Essex
CO9 2JT

Dear Mrs Jaques

Special measures monitoring inspection of Richard De Clare Community Academy

Following my visit with Adrian Lyons and Fyfe Johnston, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to your school on 23-24 June 2021, 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 June 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered the evidence, I recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

PROTECT-INSPECTION



I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of Bridge Academy Trust,, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 23 June 2021 and 24 June 2021

Context

The previous headteacher left the school shortly after the section 5 inspection in June 2019. A leader from another school in the North Essex multi-academy trust was seconded to the role of head of school at Richard De Clare on 1 September 2019. This secondment ends on 31 August 2021. The headteacher of another school in the trust was seconded to the role of executive headteacher for the same period. An early years leader was seconded to the school, from the interim executive headteacher's school, for the 2020/21 academic year.

The school's governing body was disbanded shortly after the section 5 inspection. A trust intervention board has been in place since November 2019. The board consists of three experienced education professionals.

The school was part of the North Essex Multi-Academy Trust when it was judged to require special measures, having joined the trust in September 2016. The trust was issued with a termination warning notice in July 2020 after the second of its four schools was judged to be inadequate.

The school became part of Bridge Academy Trust on 1 April 2021. Trust leaders have been working closely with the school since that point, as well as prior to it. Bridge Academy Trust's primary teaching and learning lead has been appointed as the head of school from September 2021.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders have made a lot of progress towards the removal of special measures, across the range of weaknesses identified by the section 5 inspection. Pupils like their school and their learning. Although there is work still to do, the school is a much better place to be than it was when the school was judged to be inadequate.

Safeguarding, quite rightly, was leaders' first and most pressing concern when they joined the school. As the previous monitoring inspection report noted, they took swift action to address the most important weaknesses. They introduced a range of suitable measures to ensure pupils' safety on the school site. These measures are now very well established and firmly part of the way the school operates. The school's single central record of pre-employment checks did not meet requirements when it was checked by inspectors. Leaders are starting to put measures in place to ensure that systems are suitably robust in future.

The interim leaders tackled the issues around the reporting and recording of safeguarding concerns shortly after they took up their posts. The electronic reporting system that had just been introduced at the time of the section 5

inspection is now being used by all staff. Staff report any concerns they have about pupils, no matter how small, recognising that what they have noticed could be part of a much bigger picture. Leaders take appropriate action in response to concerns raised, and they record those actions fully.

Leaders introduced a new scheme for teaching phonics in February 2020, shortly before the first COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions were introduced. Leaders have continued to focus on reading, and staff have continued to teach the phonics curriculum, throughout the pandemic. As a result, pupils are remembering the phonics they have been taught and are using this knowledge to help them blend sounds together to read.

Leaders know that there is still work to do with early reading. They recognised that the books in the school's reading scheme were not well matched to the phonics curriculum. They replaced some of the books in September 2020 and these have been in regular use throughout the year. Leaders have recognised the crucial importance of ensuring that all early readers always have appropriate books available to them. Bridge Academy Trust has invested heavily in new phonics books. This stock has now been delivered, ready for the new academic year.

A new curriculum was written during the summer term last year and launched in September 2020. Leaders ensured that staff continued to deliver this curriculum when schools moved to mainly remote delivery of education in January 2021, when further national COVID-19 restrictions were introduced. The many challenges presented by the pandemic, such as remote delivery of the curriculum and working on site in 'bubbles', has limited the extent to which leaders have been able to check how well the curriculum is being delivered. There are firm plans in place to improve the curriculum further in the autumn term. For example, the trust leaders have commissioned an external consultant to work with the school on developing the English curriculum, as well as improving the quality of its delivery.

Assessment of how well pupils learn the curriculum is developing, particularly in English and mathematics. The assessment methodology is not fully developed in all areas of the curriculum. This means that leaders and staff do not yet have a full and accurate picture of pupils' progress in all subjects.

Behaviour is improving and the atmosphere around the school was calm during the inspection. The number of fixed period exclusions has reduced, although they remain high. Low-level disruption is an issue that continues to require attention. Pupils told inspectors that they are often disrupted, and it is difficult to concentrate, because of other pupils' talking during lessons.

Responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were positive, overall. However, some parental dissatisfaction remains. About a third of respondents said that they would not recommend the school to others.

Additional support

The capacity for the previous multi-academy trust to support was limited after its lead secondary school was judged to be inadequate in February 2020. The current multi-academy trust took over on 1 April 2021. In the short time since then, the central trust leaders have supported and challenged the school well. For example, they have provided training and coaching for staff to improve the delivery of the curriculum. The trust has secured long-term leadership for the school. The trust's teaching and learning lead has been appointed as the head of school.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with: the interim executive headteacher and interim head of school; other leaders; the trust's chief executive officer, director of primary education and the teaching and learning lead; groups of pupils and staff and the chair of the trust intervention board. Inspectors looked at pupils' work, observed pupils reading to staff and visited lessons. They looked at a range of school documents, including those to do with safeguarding. Inspectors took account of 64 responses to Parent View and 33 free-text comments left by parents. They also took note of the 46 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.