

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Steve White
Houghton Regis Academy
Parkside Drive
Houghton Regis
Dunstable
Bedfordshire
LU5 5PX

Dear Mr White

Special measures monitoring inspection of Houghton Regis Academy

Following my visit with Tracy Fielding, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 29 and 30 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 January 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 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

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

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered 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 of the Greenwood Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Al Mistrano
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 June 2021

Context

Houghton Regis Academy is a small secondary school which will close in August 2022. As part of the planned closure there have been reductions in the number of staff and pupils. Consequently, the school only serves pupils in Years 7 to 9 and there have been a number of changes in staff.

Staff changes are ongoing, particularly in leadership. The school currently has a leader undertaking the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination. A special educational needs coordinator from a neighbouring primary school works one day each week at the school.

Rather than provide direct support, trust leaders continue to rely on the local teaching school alliance to help school leaders. The local authority has also started to support the school's leaders to make improvements.

The school was judged as requiring special measures on 23 January 2019. The school has been part of the Greenwood Academies Trust since January 2015.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the previous section 5 inspection in January 2019, the trust has not made the necessary improvements to the school. Their low expectations of what the school can achieve is a significant barrier to the school's improvement and pupils' future success. The quality of education remains poor and does not enable pupils to learn what they should to make successful next steps in their education. Leaders have not designed the curriculum well enough so that pupils learn more and can remember what they have already been taught.

The curriculum does not provide pupils with the basic skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils need in order to read well and become fluent readers. While pupils now have access to better quality texts, pupils lack some basic knowledge. These gaps in their learning hinder their ability to achieve well in English. Pupils told us that they worry that they are not prepared for GCSE studies.

Leaders have not improved the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The trust has not provided the necessary expertise and training needed for school leaders and staff to support these pupils effectively. Leaders do not consider the needs of pupils with SEND when planning the curriculum. When delivering the curriculum, teachers and support staff do not provide these pupils with the support they need to learn what they should. We saw many examples of curriculum plans and their implementation that made it harder for these pupils to learn.

Leaders told us that, as the number of pupils continues to reduce, staff are more likely to be teaching subjects for which they are not specialists. The trust has not provided effective training for staff to understand and teach unfamiliar curriculum areas. Staff have reported on the staff questionnaire that the school does not use professional development well to support teachers' improvement. Staff also reported that leaders do not manage workload well.

You have reduced the amount of extreme anti-social behaviour and fixed-term exclusions. Pupils understand the behaviour systems in place, and staff use the behaviour policy consistently. Classrooms, corridors and outdoor spaces are calm. However, the amount of disruptive behaviour remains unacceptably high and this affects pupils' learning. We saw too many pupils not attending to their learning or taking pride in what they were doing. Pupils' books showed that this occurs regularly. Some pupils told us that they did not always feel respected by other pupils and that the poor behaviour of others hinders their learning.

Trust leaders and members of the trust board have an inaccurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Reports to the board of trustees have not provided the information that board members need to understand the quality of the school's provision. Trustees have not held trust leaders to account for the unacceptably low standards at the school.

During the inspection in February 2020, I found the trust's statement of action and the school development plan to be not fit for purpose. This continues to be the case. This is because the activities suggested within the plans are not connected or ordered in sensible ways. This has led to confusion between staff carrying out the improvement activities. For example, we found externally commissioned tutors delivering support for pupils that was unrelated to the newly designed curriculum plans. Similarly, the trust has not clarified the arrangements for monitoring the progress of leaders' work. Where monitoring has occurred and areas for improvement identified, leaders have not planned effectively for staff to make changes. As a result, leaders' plans have become increasingly more complicated and confusing as more areas for improvement arise.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Trustees need to communicate clearly the trust's ambition, vision and commitment for pupils at Houghton Regis Academy. Trustees must hold trust leaders strictly to account for the quality of education and behaviour at the school.
- Trust leaders need to design well-ordered improvement plans that trustees, trust leaders, external agencies and staff understand and can carry out systematically.
- Trust leaders need to ensure effective training is in place so that staff can improve their work while adapting to the changes taking place at the school.

- Trust leaders must ensure that they monitor the quality of education and behaviour at the school accurately. Trust leaders must use this information to make rapid improvements.

Additional support

Trust leaders have brokered support from a teaching school alliance. Staff from the alliance have supported school leaders with staff's recruitment and leadership development. Staff from the teaching school alliance have also written successful bids for external funding for extra support, including to purchase information and communication technology equipment and to fund tutors to help pupils in English and mathematics. Trust leaders have not integrated this support well within the school's provision.

School leaders have also secured support from the local authority. The local authority has provided funding for staff's training and development. Trust leaders have not worked with the local authority or incorporated this support within the trust's improvement plans.

Evidence

We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, the chair of the board of trustees, the trust's strategic director of academies, a representative of the local authority, pupils and staff. We visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. We talked to pupils about their learning and their views of the school.

We scrutinised the school's curriculum plans, development plans and minutes of trustees' meetings. I considered the 11 responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and the 19 responses to the staff questionnaire.