

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



9 January 2022

Samantha Bowen
Interim Principal
Houghton Regis Academy
Parkside Drive
Houghton Regis
Dunstable
Bedfordshire
LU5 5PX

Dear Miss Bowen

Special measures monitoring inspection of Houghton Regis Academy

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 25 November 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 third 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 second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance 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 the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Greenwood Academies multi-academy 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

Paul Wilson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 24 November 2021 and 25 November 2021

Context

Houghton Regis Academy is a much smaller than average-sized secondary school. It has four classes of pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. Although the school is subject to a closure order at the end of the 2021/22 academic year, a new intake of 30 Year 7 pupils joined the school in September 2021. The proportions of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils remain above the national average.

There was a significant reduction in staff numbers in July 2021. Many non-teaching staff were made redundant as part of restructuring the school prior to closure. Most of the senior leadership team in place at the time of the previous monitoring inspection have left. They have been replaced by an interim principal and vice principal from within the remaining staff. The Greenwood Academies Trust (the trust) has appointed a senior education adviser, who works with the new leadership team.

At the time of this inspection, no pupils were receiving education remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Attendance of pupils and staff has been impacted by COVID-19, with some staff having long-term absence as a result.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Following the second monitoring inspection, the trust has reconsidered its priorities for the school. A trust senior education adviser now works alongside the interim principal and a national leader for education (NLE) to oversee and coordinate the support provided. This is now ensuring that different improvement activities complement one another. This was previously lacking and was a barrier to sustained improvement. Much needed improvements in teaching and curriculum design are now evident.

Trust leaders have acted to address the lack of ambition identified at the previous monitoring inspection. Trust and school leaders are united in wanting to provide a much better quality of education for pupils in their remaining time at the school. They have worked with the NLE to provide improved resources, such as IT equipment and higher quality texts, which are being used to support pupils' learning. Pupils commented positively on how teachers are now helping them to remember important knowledge through 'fun quizzes' and regularly revisiting key concepts. Pupils also say that teachers are trying to help them catch up with learning missed due to COVID-19 and previously weak teaching.

Leaders check that curriculum plans better identify the important knowledge that pupils need to learn. For teachers who teach subjects outside their areas of expertise, leaders provide the guidance and help that teachers need to plan lessons and teach more effectively. While this has led to some improvements in helping pupils to know and remember more, there is still more work to do. Teachers sometimes do not spot or

anticipate pupils' misunderstandings. Some teachers lack the detailed subject knowledge to teach the full breadth of content well. Leaders recognise this and have planned further training and support to improve the quality of teaching further.

The previous monitoring inspection found that the curriculum did not provide pupils with the basic knowledge and understanding they need to read well and become fluent readers. Leaders have prioritised the teaching of reading further. Pupils now have more opportunities to read in class and to adults. Pupils say that the texts that they are reading in English lessons are relevant to them and cover thought-provoking themes. The weakest readers are benefiting from more targeted support to develop their phonics knowledge and understanding of the texts they read. Leaders know which parts of the English curriculum need to further improve. A specialist leader of education is providing support to improve further the quality of teaching and learning in the subject.

Pupils with SEND, while having improved provision, are not experiencing a good quality of education. This is particularly the case for pupils who are not in receipt of an education, health and care plan. Support from a special needs coordinator (SENCo) from a local primary school has continued. Training needs for teaching staff have been identified. Some training has been delivered. While learning support assistants are providing effective support to help pupils with SEND to access the curriculum, teachers are not showing consistently high enough ambition or expectations for pupils with SEND. Teachers have more access to information about pupils' individual needs and how to meet them. However, teachers are not using this information routinely in order to adapt the curriculum or activities to support the learning of pupils with SEND.

Leaders have secured further improvements in pupils' behaviour. Pupils said that they felt behaviour was much improved and that they could now learn in lessons. There are fewer incidents of disruptive behaviour that require pupils to be removed from lessons. However, there are still occasions where pupils quietly choose not to take part in learning or lose focus when completing tasks. Pupils do respond when directed by staff, but some staff do not act quickly enough.

The trust has strengthened its oversight of the school. Those providing support to leaders are being held more closely to account. Trustees and trust leaders now have a more accurate view of the quality of education and pupils' behaviour. They know what needs to improve and what actions they need to take. Leaders' school improvement plan accurately identifies priorities for improvement. These are underpinned by a considered set of actions needed to achieve these priorities. Trust and school plans set ambitious yet achievable timescales for actions and improvement. The trust's statement of action and the school improvement plan are now fit for purpose.

School and trust leaders know the barriers to improvement caused by difficulties in recruiting staff to a school that is due to close. They are providing ongoing support for unqualified teachers and staff teaching outside of their specialisms. Trust leaders are aware that the rate of improvement needs to accelerate further. They must ensure that

the momentum does not stall due to staffing changes, either in the school or from those providing support.

Teaching staff are committed to helping pupils complete their education at the school. Those teachers who have worked with trust staff feel that this support has been beneficial to improving their teaching and the curriculum. However, other staff are unaware of the trust's support. Staff appreciate the work of school leaders and what leaders want to achieve for pupils.

Additional support

The trust has continued to broker the support of a NLE, and a local teaching school alliance, to work with leaders to improve provision. However, the trust has provided direct support from leaders at other trust schools to help with curriculum development in some subjects, such as science and mathematics. Specialist leaders in education brokered by the NLE and trust are also supporting teachers and school leaders. This is improving curriculum planning and the effectiveness of teaching in the school.

The local authority provides the services of an education welfare officer who works with leaders in challenging and supporting the parents and carers of pupils with poor attendance. The interim principal is also participating in an induction programme for new headteachers, which is provided by the local authority. The local authority has informed school leaders that it can offer several days of support to the school. School and trust leaders should explore what the nature of this support would be and how it can be incorporated into their plans to improve the quality of provision and ensure that pupils are well prepared for transition to new schools in 2022/23.

Evidence

The inspector met with the interim principal, vice principal, the trust senior education adviser and the NLE working with school leaders. The inspector had a meeting with the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, the trust's strategic director of academies and the trust's chief education officer. He held a telephone conversation with the chair of the trust board. To gain the views of staff, the inspector held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and reviewed 6 written responses to Ofsted's survey for staff.

The inspector visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils to gather their views on the school and their learning. The inspector scrutinised documents, including trust and school leaders' improvement plans, curriculum plans and records of pupils' behaviour. There were no responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View.