

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



21 July 2022

Anthony Hutchings
Interim Headteacher
Austin Farm Academy
Delamere Road
Eggbuckland
Plymouth
Devon
PL6 5XQ

Dear Mr Hutchings

Special measures monitoring inspection of Austin Farm Academy

Following my visit to your school on 14 and 15 June 2022, 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 most 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 November 2021. 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:

The school continues to be inadequate. Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school's action plans are fit for purpose.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may 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 Westcountry Schools Trust, a multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Barraclough
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 14 June 2022 and 15 June 2022

Context

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has left his post. The school is currently led by an interim headteacher who has been seconded from another school within the trust for four days per week. A new permanent headteacher has been appointed for September 2022. The interim headteacher will remain as executive headteacher in the first instance for one day per week from September 2022. One member of the teaching staff has left the school.

The trust is in the process of reorganising its governance function. As a result, a director of education holds leaders accountable to the trust board while the full governance consultation takes place.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders have made a positive and determined start to improving the school. With the support of the trust, they have set a clear direction of travel. Everyone knows what is expected and where the key priorities lie. Leaders have carefully planned and prioritised development in reading, writing and mathematics. These will form the foundations for continued improvement in the long-term.

The interim headteacher has instilled confidence in staff and parents. One parent commented, 'I have nothing negative to say about the school. I wished I had brought my children here sooner.' There are high levels of engagement from staff in relation to leaders' aims and ambitions. Staff are rising to the challenge. They appreciate the improvements made to communication and regular feedback as to what is working well. However, leaders are not complacent and know that there is still much to do to ensure pupils receive a high-quality education.

Leaders have ensured that there is a consistently taught phonics programme in place. This area of the school's work is now well led. Leaders assess and understand how well pupils are learning to read. Pupils now receive the right support to meet their needs. Appropriate training and coaching for staff are beginning to impact on the quality of phonics teaching. Staff expertise is improving. This is starting to enable staff to support pupils with their reading more effectively as well as staff being able to support each other in their delivery of the phonics programme.

The new writing curriculum is showing clear signs of development. Leaders have begun to check what is happening in classrooms. They ensure that staff follow agreed approaches to the teaching of writing. Leaders now challenge teachers where their practice is less strong. Teachers model and articulate relevant language through writing sessions well. Pupils' attitudes to their learning in most classes are positive. However, this is less apparent at the top end of key stage 2. Staff subject knowledge is not as strong as it needs to be. This inhibits pupils' learning.

A new approach to the teaching of mathematics is currently being trialled in some classes. Early signs are positive. Pupil feedback shows there is greater challenge. However, it is too soon to see the full impact. Although staff have high expectations for their pupils, subjects in the wider curriculum are still developing. Staff expertise beyond English and mathematics remains inconsistent.

Well-developed safeguarding processes and procedures ensure that pupils are safe. Concerns, however small, are reported through appropriate systems. Leaders act swiftly to protect pupils from harm. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities. Leaders have responded quickly to the areas of concern raised at the last inspection regarding site safety and the recruitment of staff. The trust carries out regular checks to mitigate any potential dangers. However, curriculum work on safety, in particular online safety, is not yet sufficiently developed.

The school has a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to pupils with specific needs. They have been clearer in setting relevant and precise targets to support pupils' learning. However, it is not currently evident how effectively teachers adapt learning for pupils with SEND.

Curriculum thinking for personal development remains in its early stages. Although leaders have raised the profile of personal, social, health and economic education across the school, staff subject knowledge and leadership of this area remain underdeveloped. However, leaders have rightly identified that this is a priority in securing improvements across all wider curriculum subjects.

Through relevant and well-targeted training, leaders are tackling the areas that need improvement. Staff benefit from shared expertise across the trust and external networks. Staff are provided with the time to disseminate new learning. They recognise the impact this is beginning to have on their practice. Staff feel listened to and engage positively in their own development.

Additional support

Clear support, direction and swift action from the trust are supporting leaders on their improvement journey. Detailed and regular scrutiny of the school's work contributes significantly to the pace and effectiveness of change. Trust leaders provide high levels of challenge that enables school leaders to identify what needs to be adapted or actioned.

The trust draws on external support to contribute to the school's improvement journey where it feels it would be beneficial.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, and other leaders including the deputy designated lead for safeguarding, the English subject leader and the special educational needs coordinator. The inspector held discussions with representatives from the multi-academy trust, including the director of education responsible for governance. The inspector also met with a range of staff and pupils throughout the school day.