

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Abi Preston
Headteacher
West Wycombe Combined School
Church Lane
West Wycombe
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP14 3AH

Dear Ms Preston

Special measures monitoring inspection of West Wycombe Combined School

Following my visit with Barbara Carr, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 6 and 7 February 2018, 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 2016. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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 school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2016.

- Improve the impact of leadership and management to ensure that:
 - school performance is kept under regular review and information used to inform school improvement plans
 - teachers receive timely feedback on how to improve their skills, including those who are newly qualified
 - parental engagement and satisfaction levels improve
 - sports funding is used to increase competitive opportunities for pupils and increase rates of participation
 - the use of additional funding, including that intended to support disadvantaged pupils, is used appropriately and gaps between these pupils' attainment and others nationally begin to close
 - the curriculum is covered in full in all age groups, and includes opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding
 - pupils who have special educational needs or disability receive appropriate support and make good progress
 - equality of opportunity exists throughout the school and all pupils have an equal chance of success
 - all groups of pupils attend school regularly.
- Improve the impact of governance to ensure that:
 - safeguarding procedures are urgently reviewed and policy and practice meet statutory requirements, including in the early years
 - staff receive appropriate training, including in 'Prevent', to protect pupils from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation
 - systems to keep teachers' performance and pay under review are implemented urgently
 - governors provide greater challenge to school leaders for school performance
 - governors receive appropriate training to develop their effectiveness.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and ensure that all incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to accelerate pupils' progress, including in early years, by ensuring that:

- staff receive appropriate training, including in the teaching of phonics to develop their skills, receive regular reviews of their performance and are set appropriate targets
- teachers plan activities in lessons that cater well for all pupils of all abilities and are pitched to take account of pupils' needs including for pupils who have special educational needs or disability and the most able
- pupils receive regular feedback so that their misconceptions are swiftly addressed, and the most-able pupils are challenged and achieve higher standards in reading and writing.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 6 February 2018 to 7 February 2018

Evidence

Inspectors made short visits to every classroom, observed assembly, break and lunchtimes and scrutinised a large sample of pupils' work. We met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and subject leaders, and members of the interim executive board (IEB) responsible for governance. Short meetings were also held with pupils. I met with an education adviser from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust (BLT) who has been supporting the school. A range of documents was scrutinised including information about pupils' progress, records of behaviour and attendance, records of meetings of the IEB, visits from advisers and the school's record of checks on staff.

Context

There have been some staff changes since the last special measures monitoring visit in June 2017. The new substantive headteacher took up post in September 2017 and three teachers have left the school and one has joined. Two non-teaching staff have left the school and one has joined. The current number of pupils on roll at the school has fallen, due to much smaller numbers within the Reception class this year. However, higher numbers of children are expected to join the school next year. Consequently, the IEB members have been careful to ensure that the school has not reduced the number of classes. Flexible use of part-time staff has enabled the school to continue to offer separate classes for Reception Year, and for each other year group in the school.

Over the past two years, members of the IEB have worked tirelessly to progress the school's transition to academy status. Despite meticulous planning and liaison, two previous academy sponsor arrangements did not come to fruition. The school did not transfer to the third potential academy sponsor as had been planned in December 2017. The school's rate of progress out of special measures has been slowed. This is partly due to this repeated uncertainty about the sponsorship of the school moving forward. The experienced and dedicated members of the IEB have been too frequently distracted from using their educational expertise to support improvements to teaching and learning. For example, they recently had to prepare further extensive documents for external agencies about the school's finances, plans and staffing.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and staff continue to demonstrate strong ambition to improve outcomes for pupils at West Wycombe. The new headteacher has growing support from an increasingly effective team of senior and subject leaders. This has ensured improvements in provision. Last term, leaders wasted no time in updating policies

and the school website, so that parents and carers have access to a range of improved information and guidance. In addition, the headteacher actively involved parents, pupils and staff in devising new visions and values for the school, and a new behaviour policy. This new policy, together with its associated sanctions and rewards, is understood and valued by everyone, and has already had a noticeable impact.

Leaders are becoming increasingly effective at analysing outcomes for different groups. More accurate planning and monitoring underpin leaders' efforts to make better use of the additional funding available through the pupil premium and sports funding. Staff training, together with improved assessment and tracking systems, is supporting teachers to make more accurate judgements of pupils' attainment and progress. Leaders now have more accurate information with which to identify pupils who are falling behind or not making enough progress. Leaders are now in a position to be able to hold teachers more stringently to account for the progress that pupils make. Leaders are aware that teachers and teaching assistants must now become more adept at using this progress information to tailor their activities and interventions more successfully, to meet pupils' individual needs.

The leaders of English and mathematics show considerable enthusiasm and dedication to lead their subjects with greater effectiveness. They are actively monitoring how well these subjects are being taught and have led school-wide initiatives to raise teachers' expectations. Leaders and governors have rightly taken steps this term to improve how well cycles of training and monitoring are sequenced. Now teachers have more time to respond to training, to consolidate their understanding and to develop their skills before the next monitoring event. This should enable leaders to hold teachers to account more effectively for the progress that pupils make.

Case studies demonstrate that subject leaders are rightly targeting improvements to writing and mathematics skills across key stages 1 and 2. More needs to be done to ensure consistency across the school, particularly that teachers have high expectations of handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar. Leaders are aware that more needs to be done to ensure that the wider curriculum is consistently challenging and engaging to ensure that all pupils, particularly the most able, make rapid progress from their starting points.

Leaders are committed to improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those who need support to catch up. Although new systems have been recently introduced to these pupils and others who need to catch up during regular afternoon sessions, the impact of this work is limited. Refinements are needed to support teachers and teaching assistants in making better use of newly improved progress information. This will allow them to tailor bespoke support and assistance that is more appropriately matched to these pupils' individual needs and so promote better progress.

The new headteacher has continued to improve assessment and provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This has included developing new policies and information for parents, and delivering training for staff. Senior leaders and the IEB are very aware that this work is ongoing and still in its early stages. Further staff training and monitoring are planned for this coming term.

Appropriate arrangements and regular training ensure that safeguarding is effective. Leaders liaise with external agencies when necessary and ensure that timely and suitable support is sourced for any vulnerable pupils. Staff understand and follow the school's policies and procedures well, and there is a caring and nurturing culture throughout the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Regular coaching and moderation of pupils' work have supported teachers to improve their practice. Appropriate training from leaders and external consultants is developing teachers' skills and deepening their ability to make learning more challenging. In the best examples seen in pupils' books, learning activities are suitably adapted to meet pupils' needs. They provide pupils with effective opportunities to promote deeper thinking and to practise their new skills. However, despite improvements, the quality of teaching across the school remains inconsistent, and more needs to be done to improve provision still further.

Teaching is increasingly reflecting the higher expectations that teachers have and the expectations of the school's new behaviour policy. More is demanded of pupils during lessons and they are becoming better, and more confident, learners. An increasing proportion of pupils' books is showing that they are beginning to respond positively to these higher demands. However, pupils' work across the different year groups is not yet of a consistently high standard; there are still some pockets of underperformance and some pupils lack pride in their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The improvements to behaviour have continued. As a result of the new behaviour policy, staff share a more consistent approach to behaviour management across the school. Better supervision around the school at break and lunchtime ensures that pupils mix well together. They are supervised to ensure that they move safely and calmly around the site. Pupils and parents recognise and value the improvements in lessons and around the school. School records show that there has been a significant reduction in the number of bullying and behavioural incidents since September.

Despite a new focus on promoting good attendance via the school website and regular newsletters, overall attendance dipped last term compared with the same period last year. Overall attendance is now below national average figures. The

attendance of disadvantaged pupils has further declined from the previously very low figure for this group. Similarly, the attendance of those who have SEN and/or disabilities has also dipped, but to a lesser extent. Although leaders' monitoring systems track the attendance of individuals, more needs to be done to improve the attendance of these groups and eliminate these differences.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes are showing signs of improvement. The proportion of children reaching the expected standard at the end of Reception Year has continued to rise and is now in line with the national average. Very good relationships, stimulating learning activities and clear routines ensure that the current children in Reception are making strong progress. The outdoor learning space has been improved since the previous monitoring visit and now provides a richer range of learning activities. These successfully encourage the development of language and number skills.

The teaching of phonics and reading skills continues to be a comparative strength. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check is in line with national figures. By the end of key stage 2, in 2017, pupils' progress in reading and mathematics from their starting points was in line with national averages. However, progress in writing was poor.

While improvements in mathematics have continued, leaders are very aware of inconsistencies that still exist, and that more needs to be done to challenge the most able pupils in some classes. Across the school, developing pupils' writing skills has rightly become a clear priority for improvement. While training and better planning supported teachers to begin to improve standards last year, not all pupils have been supported to catch up from their previous underperformance. Case studies shared with inspectors exemplify how the leader of English worked hard to develop engaging learning activities that promoted some extended creative writing in all year groups last term. However, there is still much to do to ensure that all teachers have consistently high expectations and that a greater proportion of pupils meet age-related expectations of handwriting, spelling and grammar.

External support

The chair and members of the IEB continue to be highly dedicated to the school and are passionately committed to drive and challenge further improvements. They are also committed to ensuring strong long-term governance for the school. Frustrated by the delays caused by three separate rounds of negotiations with three different multi-academy trusts, they are now firmly resolved to focus their efforts on raising standards of teaching and learning. Together with consultants from BLT, the IEB have reviewed and monitored standards in the school and have adapted how they work to improve effectiveness. Their members visit the school regularly to meet with leaders and review safeguarding arrangements. As a result of the school's improved assessment and tracking systems, IEB members now have access

to more reliable and accurate progress information and are using this to challenge leaders. The IEB and the local authority are rightly focused on the need to review the effectiveness of leaders' actions to support disadvantaged pupils, and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.