

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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John Meagher
Headteacher
Failsworth School
Brierley Avenue
Failsworth
Manchester
M35 9HA

Dear Mr Meagher

Special measures monitoring inspection of Failsworth School

Following my visit with John Leigh and Marcia Harding, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 23–24 February 2016, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2014. 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection to any department.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in October 2014.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good across all year groups and quickens students' progress, especially in English and mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - the tasks set for all groups and abilities of students, including boys, the most able and the disadvantaged, provide them with a good level of challenge and enable them to achieve their potential
 - marking regularly tells students how well they are doing and what they need to do next to make further progress
 - teachers' questioning encourages and promotes students' further thinking and progress.

- Improve students' literacy skills by making sure that:
 - the school reviews its literacy policy to ensure that it addresses all aspects of literacy and that it is delivered in ways that meet the needs of all groups and abilities of students effectively
 - literacy teaching focuses on developing students' reading, use of grammar and the accuracy of their spelling and punctuation
 - expectations of the presentation, handwriting and layout of students' work are consistently high across the school.

- Ensure that students have good attitudes to learning by making sure that:
 - teaching effectively involves and interests students so that they want to learn
 - there are consistently high expectations of students' behaviour for learning
 - all staff implement the behaviour policy promptly and consistently in all lessons.

- Increase the impact of leadership and management at all levels by ensuring that:
 - all leaders and managers have an accurate understanding of what data are saying about students' progress and that they ensure that teachers use this information effectively to set work that meets the students' needs
 - leaders and managers identify exactly what the weaknesses in teaching are in their areas of responsibility and that they check to make certain that these weaknesses have been robustly addressed
 - students' targets are realistically challenging so that all students can attain their potential.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 23 February 2016 to 24 February 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, pupils, and members of the interim executive board (IEB), including the local authority Director of Children's Services. A telephone discussion was held with one of the school's achievement partners.

The inspection team paid particular attention to the quality of teaching and learning and the leadership and management of teaching and learning. Much of the teaching was observed alongside a member of the school's senior leadership team, enabling inspectors to observe the quality of leaders' feedback to teachers on their performance.

Context

In December 2015 the local authority, with the support of the Department for Education, replaced the governing body with an interim executive board.

Since the last inspection, eight teachers, half of whom were on temporary contracts, have left the school and 11 teachers have joined, four of whom are covering for teachers on maternity leave.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The appointment of an IEB marks a significant change in the leadership and management of the school. The members of the IEB are highly experienced and skilled educationalists and understand well what needs to be done to bring about the rapid improvements needed to remove this school from special measures. Since their appointment they have provided appropriately robust levels of challenge to the headteacher and senior leaders, with a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. However, as their appointment is relatively recent, it is too early to see evidence of impact.

The school has put in place a range of actions to manage and improve the quality of teaching and learning. These include more frequent observations of teaching, scrutiny of pupils' books, and more robust reviews of the information that departments hold about pupils' progress. Teachers' professional development training has been appropriately focused on the need to stretch and challenge pupils more, particularly the most-able; assessing pupils' work to improve their learning; and using information about pupils' levels of understanding to plan lessons more effectively. However, the school's monitoring of the impact of these initiatives on pupils' learning is limited.

Senior leaders with responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning are not taking sufficiently robust actions to effect the rapid improvements that are required. Expectations of teachers' performance are too low; the requirement for teachers not to do any more than 'meet expectations' hinders their motivation to strive for excellence. Leaders are over-generous in their judgements and reluctant to give difficult messages about underperformance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inspectors noted little improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection. There are examples of good practice, but much of the teaching requires improvement and some is inadequate. Although relationships are strong and the atmosphere in lessons is calm and purposeful, pupils are rarely challenged to excel. Pupils who enter the school with high levels of attainment are particularly let down by the low expectations of their teachers and they subsequently fail to reach their academic potential.

Most teachers have good subject knowledge and prepare their resources well, enabling lessons to run smoothly. However, they rarely ask searching questions that will help them ascertain pupils' understanding and deepen their learning. In the majority of lessons, pupils, regardless of their prior knowledge or ability, are expected to undertake tasks with similar low levels of challenge, and much of the teaching prevents pupils expressing flair and creativity in their work.

The decision by the school to engage pupils in frequent self- and peer assessment has not been monitored for its impact on learning. In some lessons, pupils clearly gain very little from the assessment of their work by another child who may have even less grasp of the topic than they have themselves. Some of the teachers and pupils who met with inspectors questioned the validity of the school's emphasis on this form of assessment, expressing the view that it failed to help them improve and limited teaching time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

This is an area of strength for the school. Safeguarding remains effective. Pupils benefit from well-developed programmes for citizenship and personal, social, health and economic education that are taught by a team of specialist teachers. This learning, together with the strong pastoral support provided by the 'Family Time' tutorial period, ensures pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Pupils are well mannered and respectful; they behave appropriately around the building and in lessons, and those who met with inspectors did not think that bullying or discriminatory behaviour was a problem. However, they did not enthuse about their time at school or view it as a source of inspiration or aspiration for their futures.

The school's inclusion provision, including the Gateway Centre, Gold Area and Studyzone, makes a good contribution to the social integration of pupils who have special educational needs or disability and those new to the country who are at the early stages of learning English. The work of the inclusion unit supports very well pupils' individual needs and this has a positive impact on their overall achievement.

Outcomes for pupils

Current levels of attainment and progress remain inadequate. Improvements have not been swift enough to ensure that pupils achieve the results they are capable of. Although the school's information about pupil outcomes is increasingly detailed and transparent, the over-reliance on predicted outcomes rather than actual outcomes is presenting a much rosier picture than is actually the case.

School assessments of the current Year 11 show them performing well below the school's predictions for the attainment of five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including mathematics and English. Attainment figures for Years 7 and 8 also indicate little improvement on previous levels of underperformance.

The groups that continue to perform least well are the economically disadvantaged pupils, boys and those who enter the school with high levels of attainment. The gaps between their performance and that of their peers show no sign of narrowing.

External support

The school continues to receive support from their selected achievement partners. Since the last inspection, they have presented the school with a review of the humanities department. Although there is evidence that their work with middle leaders has increased the awareness that heads of department have of their roles and responsibilities, there is little evidence of impact on the quality of teaching or pupil outcomes.