

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



28 June 2016

Mrs Helen Round
Principal
Oasis Academy Fir Vale
Owler Lane
Fir Vale
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S4 8GA

Dear Mrs Round

Special measures monitoring inspection of Oasis Academy Fir Vale

Following my visit to your school on 14–15 June 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 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 January 2016.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint any more newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Bowyer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently secure effective leadership at all levels with the skills and expertise to:
 - rapidly improve the quality of teaching
 - improve pupils' behaviour, minimise the impact of poor behaviour on pupils' learning and ensure that all pupils feel happy and safe in school
 - improve attendance, ensuring that pupils attend regularly and on time in order to provide consistency and continuity in their learning.

- Improve the quality of teaching to secure good or better progress for all pupils by:
 - ensuring that teachers assess pupils' work accurately, plan lessons that build upon and extend pupils' prior learning effectively, and provide the right level of challenge and support for pupils
 - making sure that teachers plan for and direct the work of teaching assistants effectively
 - developing teachers' subject knowledge so that the basic skills of communication and language, reading, writing and mathematics are taught well
 - improving the teaching of phonics to enable younger pupils to speak, read and write with greater confidence
 - developing a language-rich environment which allows pupils to immerse themselves in spoken and written language.

- Ensure that the youngest children get off to the best possible start by improving the cohesion and consistency of planning, teaching, assessment and use of resources in the early years.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 14–15 June 2016

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and pupils' work. She met with the principal and deputy principal, other senior and middle leaders, teachers and support staff, the regional academy director, the academy council, pupils, and parents and carers.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of staff changes. The school has appointed a deputy principal and an experienced early years teacher and leader. In addition, there are new middle leaders for English, special needs and the pupil premium. An inclusion manager has been appointed as well as an attendance officer. Two permanent teachers and one temporary teacher, who is a newly qualified teacher, have all been appointed into key stage 1.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The clarity, vision and dogged determination of the principal has been a key factor in driving forward the timely and appropriate actions set out in the academy trust's statement of action and the school's action plan. Senior leaders and managers have urgently addressed the need to secure and improve leadership. The principal and both the deputies have worked tirelessly since the inspection in January to support and develop other senior and middle leaders to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to lead. These leaders are increasingly better placed to take forward actions and, since the start of the summer term, this has quickened the momentum of the improvements needed. Leaders' significant work on improving the personal development and welfare of pupils, including safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, has resulted in a marked change in the culture and ethos of the school which, in turn, is starting to have a positive impact on the progress pupils are making.

The academy trust's statement of action and the school's action plan are sharply focused on what needs to be done to improve the school. Senior leaders make clear what they expect, and have ensured that they check regularly and more robustly on the impact of their actions. Nevertheless, some self-evaluation and, in particular, the assessment of the progress pupils are making in mathematics and English is overgenerous. This is because leaders have not focused sharply enough on the impact of teaching on learning and pupils' progress, particularly when looking at pupils' work.

Senior leaders have provided well-targeted professional development and support for staff. This has involved coaching and mentoring and modelling effective practice. In addition, leaders have drawn on support from other schools in the academy trust and in Sheffield. Teachers and teaching assistants say they have valued this support which is improving teaching, particularly in the aspects of behaviour management and the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters represent). Nevertheless, leaders agree there is still much to do.

Leaders are focusing predominantly on improving standards in speaking and listening, reading, writing and mathematics. They recognise there is work to be done to develop the whole curriculum, and the teaching of it, to broaden pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world they live in, British culture and the values we uphold. Pupils, however, are enjoying the increased opportunities they now have to learn about and visit places of interest.

Leaders continue to strive to develop positive relationships with parents and the community. They actively seek to find effective solutions to the different language barriers so that parents have a much better understanding of the work and progress of the school.

A review of the use of pupil premium funding has been undertaken and a comprehensive report provided. The newly appointed leader with responsibility for this aspect of development has noted the recommendations of the report and is taking appropriate action. She has an increasingly clear and accurate picture of the school's work and what is needed. She has begun to work more closely with the school's special needs coordinator, inclusion manager and attendance officer to target and review actions to ensure that each pupil has the support needed to make progress. There are more robust systems and procedures in place to evaluate the impact of actions and spending. Similar improvements can be seen in the leadership and provision of special needs.

The review of governance and its effectiveness is under way. This has focused on the work of the academy council which supports governance but has no statutory powers. Presently, members are completing a self-review and audit of their knowledge and skills. Nonetheless, they have greater clarity about their roles as critical friends and are developing the skills and expertise needed to undertake this work. They are involved in the school's action plan. The principal shares information with them regularly and they undertake focused visits to the school so they can question and support its work. This includes looking at safeguarding. There is an openness and transparency in the relationship between the academy council and the academy trust concerning statutory matters such as funding and the recruitment of staff. The academy council continues to provide an effective link between the school and community, and to take heed of parents' views as seen in a response to a recent parent survey.

The safeguarding of pupils is effective. The school now has robust systems and procedures in place to ensure this. Staff involved with leading safeguarding are tenacious in seeking to ensure that pupils are safe and the support they need is provided in a timely manner. All adults in school put the safety of children first and are vigilant and conscientious in recording and reporting their concerns. Systems and procedures for safeguarding pupils have improved considerably since the school was subject to a non-formal designated monitoring inspection in December 2015.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is improving because of leaders' actions and recent changes to staffing. This is particularly noticeable in the early years, where the new leader has worked hard to improve the consistency and coherence in teaching, assessment and the use of resources between the Reception class and the Nursery. She has ensured the provision is better targeted to individual children's needs. This, combined with targeted interventions for speech and language, is ensuring that children are developing at a faster rate than previously seen from very low starting points. Leaders recognise there is still work to be done to embed these changes, and they are keen to develop the outdoor environment as an effective learning environment for the early years.

There are pockets of effective teaching across the school, but in some instances it is not ensuring that pupils make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because a number of teachers are not using assessment effectively to know what pupils can do and need to learn. Weak subject knowledge and an understanding of progression in learning is hindering progress in some of these classes. Expectations are not as high as they need to be. Nevertheless, improvements in classroom behaviour management and the culture and ethos of the school mean that pupils are now in a better position to learn and make progress.

Leaders have focused heavily on improving the teaching of phonics and communication and language skills. This work has been further supported by well-targeted interventions for speech and language and increased opportunities for speaking. Observations of teaching and pupils' work indicate that the teaching of phonics is much improved and is benefiting all pupils, but especially the youngest. Pupils are more ready and confident to speak in English with each other and adults.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Improving the welfare and behaviour of pupils has been a high priority in order to provide a stronger foundation for learning. This aspect of the school's work is much improved.

The whole staff team has pulled together quickly to ensure that there is consistency and fairness in the way pupils are treated. By noting and celebrating good behaviour and attitudes to learning, pupils are more motivated. They are much clearer about the consequences of their behaviour and there has been a marked decline in the number of incidents of poor behaviour.

The inclusion manager and his team have been instrumental in leading and supporting the recent and marked improvements in pupils' behaviour and attendance. Simple changes such as resourcing playtimes and zoning areas have ensured that pupils have a happier and safer playtime. The fact that leaders are anticipating potential difficulties before they arise has ensured that some pupils are now coping better with school and having a positive learning experience. Improved systems for monitoring behaviour and attendance mean that this team is looking for patterns of weak behaviour and attendance, and seeking to find solutions. The team's prompt actions have prevented matters from escalating like they used to do. The newly appointed attendance officer has been pivotal in improving attendance over the summer term. There is evidence of increasingly positive relationships developing between home and school as a result of these changes.

Outcomes for pupils

It is clear that pupils are starting to make better progress because poor behaviour in lessons is no longer holding them back, and work to develop and improve speaking and listening skills is enabling pupils to engage more fully in their learning.

Where teaching is stronger and more effective and where interventions have been well targeted, pupils are starting to make much better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, this is not a consistent or sustained picture across the school. Standards remain significantly below those seen nationally.

The strongest outcomes are seen in the early years, noticeably in the class taught by the early years leader. This is because her expectations are higher and she has a better understanding of how children learn and what is needed to ensure that they make progress. Her work is starting to make a positive difference to standards across the setting. This is ensuring that most of the youngest pupils are getting off to a better start than previously seen, and those pupils who have been at the school since Nursery are set to meet the good level of development. Progress is also improving in Year 1 where there is an increased proportion of pupils on track to meet the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check.

External support

The regional academy director has provided effective support for the principal in her first year of headship and has helped her to steer the school through difficult and challenging circumstances. He has an accurate view of where the school is at and what needs to be done to secure improvements. He is fully aware of how this

professional relationship needs to develop in order to provide the challenge needed and to hold senior leaders to account for the progress the school is making.

The academy trust has clear systems and procedures in place for monitoring the work and progress of the school. The latest external review by the academy trust provides a useful external evaluation of the school's work, but some judgements are overgenerous and unhelpful, particularly in relation to leadership and pupils' outcomes.

Leaders are outward looking and have actively sought appropriate support from other Oasis schools, schools in Sheffield and the local authority. These links have strengthened leadership and provided staff with opportunities for professional development and building relationships with staff in other schools. The trust has drawn effectively upon expertise in its other schools to strengthen leadership and increase the school's capacity to improve. The local authority has provided effective support for the development of special educational needs, which has ensured that there are clearer systems and procedures in place for the identification of pupils' needs. With improved provision, these pupils are starting to get the help they need to make better progress.