

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



23 December 2016

Mr Keith Hobbs
Headteacher
Stephenson Studio School
Thornborough Road
Coalville
Leicestershire
LE67 3TN

Dear Mr Hobbs

Special measures monitoring inspection of Stephenson Studio School

Following my visit to your school on 22 to 23 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 2015. 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's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers 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 Leicestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hollingsworth

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2015

- Improve the quality of teaching by making sure that:
 - all teachers use information about pupils' starting points to plan lessons that enable all pupils to make good progress
 - teachers use questioning equally well to check what pupils know and can do, and use this information to help pupils speed up their learning
 - all teachers ensure that pupils act on the advice they give them to improve their work
 - there are more opportunities in all subjects to develop pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
 - least-able pupils, especially in mathematics at key stage 4, rapidly receive the support and help they need to do well in their courses
 - the progress of groups is monitored more closely so that any underachievement is quickly identified and tackled.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - urgently reviewing the suitability of sixth-form courses to ensure that they build upon pupils' prior attainment and enable all pupils to succeed
 - ensuring that the curriculum at both key stages allows pupils to develop the reading, writing and mathematical skills they need to do well in the next stage of their education, training or employment, and is suited to their needs and aspirations
 - reviewing the process of monitoring and evaluation of teaching to ensure that leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and use this information to target improvements more closely
 - urgently reviewing the effectiveness of governance and external support to ensure that the school makes rapid improvements and that standards rise more quickly
 - building on the newly established links with partner schools to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in the school.

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 the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 22 November 2016 to 23 November 2016

Evidence

The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the designated safeguarding lead, leaders who manage pupils' work placements, and six trustees. He also spoke with the school improvement partner. The inspector observed pupils' learning in 11 lessons, during which he spoke with pupils and looked at their books. The inspector conducted three of these observations jointly with the headteacher. The inspector met formally and informally with a range of pupils across Years 10 and 11. He also looked at Year 10 pupils' books with the subject leaders for mathematics and English. The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documents relating to the school's work. These included the school improvement plan, the school's self-evaluation of its performance and the headteacher's most recent report to the trustees. The inspector looked at documentation relating to pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching, and the school's use of pupil premium funding. The inspector checked the school's single central record of recruitment.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the headteacher, who was headteacher at the time of the full inspection in September 2015, has left the school. An acting headteacher took up the post in September 2016. The school has appointed a deputy headteacher who has responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning, and an assistant headteacher who oversees pupils' achievement.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the previous monitoring inspection, senior leaders have not taken sufficient action to ensure that the quality of teaching has improved well enough across all subjects. Their checks on the quality of teaching indicate that not all teachers have put into practice the training they have received to improve their teaching. Because of this, the quality of teaching at the school continues to be variable. It is not good enough to secure the necessary improvements in pupils' outcomes, particularly in Year 11 mathematics and English.

Senior leaders have ensured that teachers have received wide-ranging and regular opportunities to develop their teaching practice, including through the sponsor college. Training sessions have covered, for example, effective questioning, supporting least-able pupils in their learning, and teaching literacy and numeracy.

Recently, teachers have also begun to work in pairs to develop their teaching, with an appropriate focus on improving the outcomes for particular groups of pupils; however, senior leaders have not ensured that teachers consistently use what they have learned through this training to improve their teaching. Consequently, there has not been the rapid improvement in the quality of teaching necessary to secure better outcomes for pupils, particularly those in Year 11.

Senior leaders do not work closely enough with subject leaders to monitor the quality of teaching, either in their subject areas, or across the whole school. As a result, subject leaders do not have a sufficiently accurate view of the support that they can provide across the school to improve teachers' practice. Subject leaders have not been able to secure the necessary improvements in the quality of teaching needed to ensure that pupils make rapid progress in their learning.

Subject leaders of English and mathematics have been too slow to introduce strategies to support teachers of other subjects in teaching communication and numeracy skills. Subject leaders were planning these strategies at the time of the last monitoring inspection. The strategies that the subject leaders have put into place are too recent to have brought about sustained improvement in pupils' use of these skills across all of their subjects, particularly for pupils in Year 11.

Senior leaders' checks on the progress of disadvantaged pupils lack the necessary precision. For example, the senior leaders do not check these pupils' progress from the pupils' different starting points. Due to this, senior leaders are unable to identify quickly enough which groups of disadvantaged pupils are underachieving and to ensure that appropriate support is put into place to help the pupils to catch up.

Since the previous inspection, the pupils' attendance at the school has declined sharply, including that of disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders have rightly recognised this decline and have begun to take action to rectify it; however, the proportion of pupils who are absent, including those who are regularly absent from school, is above national levels.

In the short time that he has been in role, the headteacher has undertaken a thorough review of the quality of the school's provision, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching. He has an accurate understanding of where the actions leaders have taken have not secured the necessary improvements. He has used this information well to establish what further developments are necessary and has begun to take appropriate action. In so doing, he has worked effectively to raise the school's expectations in relation to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.

Crucially, senior leaders were quick to establish the level of individual Year 10 pupils' communication and numeracy skills upon their arrival at the school in September. This enabled senior leaders to identify where pupils are behind in these skills and so to provide appropriate support to help these pupils to catch up. Because of this, many of the pupils who had fallen behind in these skills previously

have been able to catch up rapidly, particularly in relation to their communication skills. The Year 10 English books that the inspector looked at, for example, indicated that pupils are now more secure and confident in their writing skills. The Year 10 pupils the inspector met were appreciative of the close support that they received upon their arrival at the school.

The headteacher's accurate review of the school's provision has enabled trustees to have a secure understanding of where senior leaders must now secure rapid improvement. Trustees have rightly considered how best they can support leaders in this, in particular by ensuring that senior leaders have the time and resources to implement changes effectively. They have also explored how the sponsor college can provide further support to the senior leaders. Through these actions, trustees provide appropriate levels of challenge and support.

Strengths in the school's approach to securing improvement

- The headteacher has undertaken a frank and thorough assessment of the quality of the school's provision, including the quality of teaching. He and his senior leaders have a clear and accurate view of the improvements that need to be made to ensure that pupils' achievement increases. He is ensuring that there are appropriate levels of support and challenge to all staff and pupils to secure the improvements.
- Senior leaders have been quick to assess the communication and numeracy skills of current Year 10 pupils, including their reading ages and spelling ability. They have used this information to provide support to enable pupils to catch up where they have fallen behind previously.
- Support for the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities continues to be strong. These pupils receive effective support to catch up with their communication skills, particularly in reading and spelling.
- Leaders have reviewed their systems for monitoring pupils' development of learning and personal skills during their work placements. These systems now provide leaders with a sharper understanding of the progress pupils are making on their work placements.
- Trustees have a correct view of the action that leaders have taken to improve the quality of the school's provision and of the impact of these strategies. They are keenly aware of the areas where the necessary improvement has yet to take place. They are taking appropriate action to ensure that senior leaders receive the support that they require to bring about the necessary improvements, including through the use of staff in the sponsor college.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement

- Leaders have not ensured that the training teachers have received to improve their teaching has resulted in the necessary improvements in the quality of teaching across all subjects.
- Because leaders have not secured the necessary improvements in the quality of teaching across the whole school, pupils' achievement remains too low, particularly for current Year 11 pupils.
- Senior leaders do not work closely enough with subject leaders to check on the quality of teaching across the school. Consequently, not all subject leaders currently provide appropriate support to ensure that the necessary improvement in teachers' classroom practice takes place.
- Subject leaders of English and mathematics have not put into place quickly enough strategies to support the development of pupils' communication and numeracy skills in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Not all teachers have high enough expectations of their pupils. Where this is the case, they do not set work that suitably engages pupils and enables them to make at least the progress they should in their learning.
- There has been a decline in pupils' attendance. Currently, the levels of attendance of pupils in Years 10 and 11 are below national levels.
- Leaders' checks on the progress of disadvantaged pupils are not sharp enough. They do not consider the progress of these pupils from their different starting points. Because of this, they are unable to identify quickly enough where disadvantaged pupils require further support to ensure that they catch up where they have previously fallen behind.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching remains too variable. Senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching identify that not all teachers have successfully applied the training that they have received to improve their classroom practice. As a result, the quality of teaching has not improved sufficiently across all subject areas to secure the necessary improvements in pupils' outcomes.

Teachers do not have high enough expectations often enough of the quantity or quality of work that pupils should complete in the lesson. They do not set activities that provide appropriate levels of support and challenge. Teachers do not ask effective questions to check on pupils' understanding and provide the necessary support. When this occurs, pupils are not secure in their learning and do not make the progress that they should.

Teachers are not consistent in ensuring that pupils take advantage of the 'Comment, Action, Rework' time, which is the opportunity for pupils to respond to the feedback that they receive from teachers. Because of this, teachers do not ensure that pupils are able to resolve any misconceptions they may have had. This prevents pupils from becoming secure in their understanding.

Where learning is most effective at the school, teachers have high expectations of what pupils should achieve and have good relationships with the pupils. Teachers use questions effectively to ensure that pupils are secure in their learning. For example, in a Year 10 science lesson, the teacher's questions about chemical bonds enabled pupils to explore their understanding of this scientific concept. The teacher's questions enabled her to identify where pupils were less secure in their understanding and to provide appropriate support. In a Year 11 history lesson, the teacher's sharp questioning enabled pupils to explore the reasons behind suffragettes' actions. Pupils engaged in this discussion fully and were able to secure their understanding of the suffragette cause.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the previous inspection, there has been a sharp decline in pupils' attendance for all pupils, and particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders rightly recognise that increased absence can significantly reduce pupils' chances of making the progress that they should. Senior leaders have recently adopted appropriate strategies to reduce this level of absence. Such strategies include ensuring that pupils and parents are aware of the importance of attending regularly and providing support for pupils who find attending school difficult, including by conducting home visits. Nevertheless, current levels of absence remain above national levels.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' achievement in 2016 was too low. The proportion of pupils who made the progress that they should across most of their subjects in 2016 was below national levels. While pupils made broadly average progress in mathematics, the progress that they made in English was too low. As a consequence, there was also a decline in pupils' attainment, particularly in the proportion of pupils who attained the measure of a grade C or above in GCSEs English and mathematics.

The progress of the least-able pupils and disadvantaged pupils was broadly average across most of their subjects in 2016. The middle-ability pupils underachieved significantly across most of their subjects, including in English.

The school's current performance information indicates that the proportion of pupils in Year 11 who are making the progress that they should remains too low, particularly in English and mathematics. The middle-ability pupils and the most able, in particular, are not making sufficient progress in their learning. Too few disadvantaged pupils, particularly the middle-ability and most-able disadvantaged pupils, are making the progress they should across most of their subjects.

16 to 19 study programmes

There are currently no students in Year 12. This is due to senior leaders' decision not to run courses in which, previously, students have not made the progress that they should.

In line with their plans for redesigning the sixth-form curriculum for September 2017, leaders have undertaken a survey of the current Year 11 pupils regarding the pupils' next steps. This survey has included establishing what subjects those pupils who intend to move into further education wish to study. Senior leaders are currently considering the results of this survey, to establish what the school may successfully offer for September 2017.

In the meantime, senior leaders are ensuring that pupils receive close support, advice and guidance in relation to their options once they finish Year 11. For example, all pupils have recently attended a skills fair, to learn about their options. Senior leaders also have in place appropriate plans to support these pupils as they prepare to move to their new places of learning, training or employment in September 2017.

External support

The level of external support that the school receives has reduced since the last monitoring inspection. The headteacher continues to receive support from the school's improvement partner, although the level of this support has reduced. The headteacher is using this support, rightly, to improve the quality of teaching.

The headteacher has worked more closely with senior leaders from the sponsor college to monitor the quality of teaching and to provide staff with training. While this support has ensured that the headteacher's evaluation of the quality of teaching is accurate, the training staff have received has not secured the necessary improvement in the quality of teaching.

The school has recently submitted a bid to continue working with a local school to improve the quality of teaching. Previously, the support received from the other school was proving effective. The school is currently awaiting the outcome of this bid.

Additional areas for improvement

- Reduce the levels of pupil absence, including that of disadvantaged pupils, so that all pupils' attendance is at least in line with national levels.