

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



12 October 2018

Mr Michael Burns  
Acting Principal  
Red House School  
Rutherglen Road  
Red House Estate  
Sunderland  
Tyne and Wear  
SR5 5LN

Dear Mr Burns

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Red House School**

Following my visit to your school on 25 September 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the executive principal and former executive principal. I also met with the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust and a group of governors. Meetings were held with leaders responsible for teaching and learning, and for attendance and behaviour. I met the leader responsible for the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils, and with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). Additionally, I met with a group of pupils and with a group of subject leaders. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

I visited a range of lessons in both key stage 3 and 4, and scrutinised pupils' books. I reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding processes and practices, and attendance and behaviour. I scrutinised information relating to the quality of teaching and learning, and the school's assessment

information about pupils' attainment. I also examined documents relating to the school's use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils. I took into consideration the 15 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

## **Context**

You were appointed to the post of acting principal in September 2018, following the departure of the principal who was in post at the time of the previous inspection. In July 2018, a new executive principal joined the school, replacing the executive principal who was in post at the time of the previous inspection. Also since the previous inspection, two vice-principals, two assistant principals, and two subject leaders have left the school. A new vice-principal and assistant principal were appointed with effect from September 2018, together with new subject leaders of science, mathematics and modern foreign languages. You also appointed a new second-in-charge of English. An additional assistant principal with responsibility for technology, information technology and computing has been seconded to the school from the trust in September 2018, initially for one year.

At the time of the previous inspection, governance was in a period of transition. The arrangements for governance are no longer transitional, with responsibility now delegated on a permanent basis from the trust board to a shared school council, in partnership with a neighbouring trust school.

## **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

Together with the trust, you have taken firm action to address the areas of particular weakness identified at the previous inspection. As the result of planned, targeted support and challenge, there are signs that the quality of leadership is improving, and that the standard of teaching and learning is also beginning to rise. You are taking steps which are improving attendance and reducing the use of exclusion, but both measures, while showing a shift in the right direction, remain at worrying levels that result in too many pupils missing time in school.

To begin to achieve the necessary improvements to the quality of leadership, you have undertaken a substantial overhaul of subject leadership. Subject leaders are becoming more skilled in their roles, so that they increasingly understand how to bring about the required improvements in teaching and learning. Supported by more experienced colleagues from the trust, subject leaders have started implementing processes for tracking pupils' progress. This is effective in monitoring both how well pupils are doing, and how well teachers are enabling pupils to make greater gains in their learning.

Leaders at all levels now understand that they are accountable for pupils' progress. Recently introduced systems for the quality assurance of leaders' actions show that they now check the effectiveness of teachers' work, and follow up where necessary. There is, though, still some variation in the confidence and clarity with which middle

leaders can articulate their understanding of their roles, and the extent to which they are being effective.

Following the previous inspection, you are taking action to address the weaknesses in leadership of special educational needs. Through the appointment of a new vice-principal and an inclusion manager, there is a coherent understanding of both the role of the SENCo and the actions required in order to meet properly the needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The SENCo is enrolled on an appropriate training course to enable him to achieve the required qualification.

You have taken steps to make sure that the assessments used in key stage 3 are underpinned by the same rigorous processes as those used in key stage 4. This is in its infancy and will be a particular focus at the next monitoring visit.

Since the previous inspection, there has been some improvement to rates of attendance as the result of leaders' actions. You have put clear processes in place to achieve this and have started to 'change the culture' in some pupils', parents' and carers' attitudes around the need to attend school regularly. However, rates of attendance, including for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, remain too low. The rate of persistent absence remains too high.

The use of fixed-term exclusion has reduced since the previous inspection, but the number of fixed-term exclusions since the start of the new academic year remains worrying. There is a shared consensus among staff and pupils that behaviour is much improved at the school. During my visit, pupils conducted themselves around the buildings and in lessons calmly and respectfully. Pupils said that the new behaviour policy has resulted in fewer interruptions to lessons because of poor behaviour, and the school's records of behaviour incidents indicate an improving picture. In most lessons visited, though, there were pupils present who had been sent there after removal from their own lesson due to repeated disruption.

Leaders have acted to implement a new curriculum for pupils' personal development and welfare. The 'Life' programme has started to equip pupils with the knowledge they need to keep themselves safe, such as e-safety and the risks associated with alcohol and drugs. However, pupils were not confident in speaking about their experiences and learning in school, and so this will continue to be a focus of subsequent monitoring visits.

There is evidence that teachers have increased their expectations of what pupils can achieve, with early indications that pupils are beginning to make more aspirational choices for their courses after they finish Year 11. Pupils say that teachers' planning is getting better at meeting pupils' learning needs, with the result that a greater proportion of lessons make them feel challenged. However, they also said that this level of appropriate challenge is variable across subjects. Teachers' use of questioning is improving, with the result that pupils' understanding of new learning

is drawn out and consolidated. At times, though, teachers' questions remain simplistic and undemanding, which does not enable pupils to grasp the new learning beyond a superficial level.

It is evident from pupils' responses, and the monitoring carried out by subject leaders, that teachers have started to become more effective in both spotting and correcting any misconceptions arising from the learning in lessons. Consequently, pupils' progress is beginning to improve.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Shaw  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**