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14 February 2020

Steve White
Principal
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Dear Mr White

Special measures monitoring inspection of Houghton Regis Academy

Following my visit to your school on 28–29 January 2020, 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 2019.

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 trust's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Al Mistrano
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2019.

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and raise outcomes by:
 - equipping teachers with the skills and support to manage behaviour in order to reduce disruption and make full use of time in lessons for learning
 - sharpening questioning so that staff can assess pupils' understanding more effectively and adapt learning where misconceptions remain
 - raising teachers' expectations of how much pupils, especially boys and the most able, can do and should achieve, so that pupils achieve well and take pride in what they do.

- Improve outcomes so that pupils' progress is at least in line with national expectations by:
 - linking support for disadvantaged pupils more closely to their needs, so that they attain as well as other pupils nationally
 - analysing the impact and effectiveness of the assistance given to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and taking appropriate actions to address weaknesses
 - ensuring that teachers plan work, especially in English, that meets pupils' different needs.

- Improve pupils' attitudes to learning in lessons by:
 - setting high expectations of pupils and planning learning that captures and retains their interest
 - eradicating the extremely poor behaviour of a significant minority by ensuring that all staff apply the behaviour management policy consistently well.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring effective support from the multi-academy trust (MAT)
 - having clear plans in place to address the significant inadequacies in the school's provision
 - reviewing the curriculum to ensure it meets all pupils' needs, especially lower attaining pupils
 - urgently embedding new plans and strategies to secure rapid improvement across the school, especially in English and for most-able pupils
 - developing the role and influence of middle leaders in driving improvement
 - improving the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment across the curriculum and linking this to good-quality training, so that teachers' practice improves quickly
 - spending additional funding effectively to meet the needs of pupils with SEND or who are disadvantaged.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 28 to 29 January 2020

Evidence

I scrutinised your records of checks of the suitability of staff to work with children and documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I also evaluated your school action plan, which a trust representative told me is the same as the trust's statement of action. I held meetings with you, other school leaders, a representative from the trust and a representative from an external agency working with the school. I also held meetings with staff and pupils. I spoke on the telephone with the chief executive officer and the chair of the trust board.

I visited classrooms with you, the vice principal and the special educational needs coordinator.

Context

Houghton Regis Academy is a small secondary school for 11- to 16-year-olds. The school has been part of the Greenwood Academies Trust since January 2015. Since 2018, trust leaders have been in discussion with the Department for Education about the prospect of closing the school. At the previous inspection, there were 317 pupils at the school. Currently, there are 282 pupils at the school.

The principal and vice principal were contracted to the school in September 2019. During the autumn term in 2019, the principal created the school's current senior leadership team. Eight teachers left the school in July 2019. Leaders say they have been experiencing challenges with recruiting teachers.

Trust leaders say that Houghton Regis Academy's distance from its other trust schools makes it difficult for trust leaders to provide direct support for the school. Trust leaders have provided financial support. They have agreed the support of a local teaching school alliance to help school leaders.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Since the inspection in January 2019, the trust has not demonstrated the determination, capability or capacity to bring about vital improvements. You and trust leaders have not created clear plans to deal with the inadequacies that were identified in the school's provision. In May 2019, the trust's statement of action was deemed unfit for purpose. One year after the previous inspection, the trust's statement of action remains unfit for purpose. School and trust plans do not focus on the urgent priorities at the school. They also do not clearly outline the steps leaders and staff must take to make the necessary changes. In contrast, the trust plans regarding the school's closure are clear.

You have not improved the behaviour of pupils at the school since the previous inspection. Teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour are still too low. Pupils say that disruptive behaviour occurs in most lessons. I saw this when visiting classrooms. School records show that the number of fixed-term exclusions increased substantially during the autumn term. School records also show that the number of pupils receiving sanctions for unacceptable behaviour also increased during the same time period. The support for pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) challenges is not effective. During the autumn term, the number of pupils with SEMH needs who received a fixed-term exclusion increased.

As at the previous inspection, there remain significant inadequacies in the provision for pupils with SEND. Staff provide very little effective support for pupils with SEND. Leaders have improved the record-keeping and guidance provided for teachers regarding these pupils. Teachers do not use this guidance. Leaders do not ensure that teachers provide the required support. Leaders do not analyse the impact and effectiveness of the support for pupils with SEND well enough.

Leaders are currently reviewing and rebuilding the curriculum. The curriculum that is currently in place does not meet the needs of pupils with SEND and lower-attaining pupils. For a very small number of pupils, leaders have provided successful alternative curriculums in partnership with a local specialist provider.

You have not improved the provision for disadvantaged pupils. The previous inspection report recommended a review of how pupil premium was used. You have not improved the provision for disadvantaged pupils or reviewed the effectiveness of the use of pupil premium.

The quality of teaching remains weak and is not improving quickly enough. Leaders have a new approach to monitoring the quality of teaching. They provide development opportunities for staff, using external specialists through the local teaching school. The desired improvements of this work have been limited because leaders have not improved teachers' abilities to manage behaviour in lessons.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Trust and school leaders do not have a clear enough understanding of the key priorities to be addressed at the school. Leaders' plans are not sufficiently focused on the most important areas in need of improvement. Similarly, leaders' plans are not clear enough to enable staff to carry them out effectively. Leaders do not outline their expectations well enough. They do not evaluate their plans effectively so that they can adapt planned actions when necessary.

Leadership capacity remains fragile. Trust leaders have not acted swiftly or effectively to improve the school. They do not provide the expertise or capacity required to make the necessary improvements. School leaders have been supported

by leaders at local teaching schools who helped to recruit the principal and vice principal for the school. Teaching school leaders have also provided mentoring for school leaders. This external support is in its infancy. The impact of the external provision to provide a better quality of education for all pupils is not evident.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school's new senior leadership team has a common commitment to improving the school and provide high-quality education.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The trust has been ineffective in providing the support the school needs to improve.
- Leaders have been ineffective in improving the effectiveness of staff to manage behaviour in classrooms and reduce persistent disruptive behaviour.

External support

The school receives ongoing support from the Redborne Teaching School Alliance. The school has also benefited from support provided by the Chiltern Teaching School Alliance.