

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



22 October 2015

Mrs Beverley Scott-Herron
Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School
Grammar School Road
Latchford
Warrington
Cheshire
WA4 1JL

Dear Mrs Scott-Herron

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School

Following my visit with Linda Foley, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 October 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

This visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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:

The school is taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

As agreed with you and members of the interim executive committee (IEC), the school may consider applications from newly qualified teachers when recruiting staff. However, the school must ensure that any newly qualified teachers appointed must receive high-quality support and be able to observe good to outstanding practice, in order to further their professional development. There are no restrictions in relation to the subject departments that newly qualified teachers can be appointed to.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of

State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Church of England Diocese of Chester, the Director of Education for the Church of England Diocese of Liverpool and the Executive Director Families & Wellbeing for Warrington.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in (September 2014)

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Take urgent steps to improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good in all subjects, particularly in English and mathematics, in order that the progress of all groups of students accelerates rapidly and they achieve well by:
 - ensuring that teachers' assessments of how well students are learning are accurate, and that they use this information to set work which enables all abilities of students to make at least good progress
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve, so that they provide more appropriate levels of challenge and ask probing questions to check students' understanding and to stimulate their interest
 - ensuring that all marking and feedback to students gives them very clear guidance about what they need to do to improve their work, particularly in their literacy development, and that students respond to the advice
 - ensuring that all teachers have good subject knowledge and that they use this effectively to explain to students what they should be learning in lessons and what they must do to be successful
 - ensuring that, in English, students have sufficient guidance to help them to structure their writing and develop their communication and extended writing skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring that students have plenty of opportunities in mathematics to solve problems so that they can develop and apply their understanding of key mathematical concepts
 - providing activities which are interesting, exciting and challenging enough so that students are encouraged to settle quickly to tasks, are keen and motivated to work hard and to do their best.

- Improve students' attendance in order that it is at least in line with the national average by using data about the attendance of particular groups of students to analyse patterns in their absence and target support more effectively.

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels, including governance, in bringing about improvements, by:
 - ensuring that middle leaders have a clear understanding of their accountability for their areas of responsibility and that they have sufficient training to enable them to be successful
 - ensuring that senior and middle leaders check that data about how well students are learning are accurate and that they use them to hold teachers to account for the progress of students in their classes
 - ensuring that action plans have clear ways of measuring their success and that monitoring activities to check on the impact of actions aimed at improving

- teaching and achievement are robust
- ensuring that performance management targets for teachers are challenging and that individuals are provided with appropriate support to help them to improve their practice
 - ensuring that governors hold the school to account effectively for its performance, including the impact of the pupil premium
 - taking steps to share and embed the good teaching practice which already exists within the school.
- 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 third monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 October 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and the senior leaders responsible for students' achievement and progress, attendance and behaviour and quality of teaching. Inspectors also met with four members of the IEC, a representative from the local authority, a representative of the Church of England Diocese of Chester, a group of English subject teachers and the heads of department responsible for the English Baccalaureate subjects. Inspectors held meetings with groups of students and considered the results of the school's parents' survey and the 22 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View. The focus of this inspection was to determine the progress the school is making against each of the areas for improvement identified by inspectors in September 2014. Inspectors placed particular emphasis on evaluating the quality of provision in English and mathematics.

Context

Since the previous inspection there have been a substantial number of staff changes. Just under half of the teachers joined the staff in September. These are all permanent appointments and, as a consequence, are bringing much-needed stability to the teaching team. The new appointments include the head of mathematics, the head of geography and the head of religious education. The vacancies in the history, English and religious education departments, as described in the previous monitoring report, have now been filled. The senior leadership team has been restructured and roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability clarified. School governance has been reviewed. As a result, the IEC has been constituted. The membership of this group includes education professionals from outstanding providers. The review of the school's use of the pupil premium (additional government funding to support the education of children who are looked after by the local authority or who are eligible for free school meals) has been completed.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes in the core subjects of mathematics and science at GCSE in 2015 show an encouraging improvement compared to 2014. The proportion of students attaining a *A–C grade in mathematics increased by 12 percentage points to a high of 63%. This increase was due, in the main, to an improvement in boys' attainment, which rose by 21 percentage points. In science, the proportion of students entered for two or more GCSE science subjects attaining an *A–C in each one rose by 55 percentage points compared to the previous year. All groups of students contributed to this improved performance.

Improvements in the quality of teaching, and targeted extra support for those students discovered to be falling behind, led to a 19 percentage point increase in the proportions of students making the progress expected of them in mathematics. All groups, and in particular the boys, showed improved performance when compared to the previous year. The school's analysis indicates that in three of the other four English Baccalaureate subject areas; namely, science, the humanities and modern languages, students' progress from their Key Stage 2 starting points improved in 2015. In addition, the effective use of pupil premium funding led to the gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and their peers closing in each of these subjects. However, as heartening as these improvements are, the school still has work to do to further improve students' progress. For example, in mathematics students' expected progress in 2015 was eight percentage points below the government's minimum expectations for 2014.

Despite the school's efforts to provide extra support for students to overcome the legacy of weak teaching in the past, outcomes in English Language GCSE in 2015 remained as weak as they were the previous year with a minority of students attaining an *A–C grade. Furthermore, compared to 2014, there was a three percentage points decline in the proportion of students making the progress expected of them in this subject, which at 37% was well below the government's most recently published minimum expected figure. Inaccuracies in teacher assessment meant that senior leaders' expectations of attainment in English were not realised. Furthermore, the targeted support that students received to address gaps in their knowledge and understanding did not have sufficient impact on their achievement.

The school's most up-to-date data for current students are indicating that in Years 8 and 9 students' progress in English and mathematics is much stronger than it is at Key Stage 4. In English for example, senior leaders report that disadvantaged students are making progress in line with their peers in the school, with most students progressing as expected from their individual starting points. On the other hand, in mathematics the progress made by disadvantaged students is below that of their peers, with the gap most marked in Year 9. At Key Stage 4, although showing signs of improvement, students' progress in English and mathematics remains too low. Senior leaders are aware of this and the urgent action required to ameliorate the impact of the inconsistencies in teaching that this group of students experienced lower down the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

A number of the recently appointed teachers are helping leaven the quality of teaching. Evidence from the work in students' books and observations of classroom practice reveals that teaching is most effective when teachers have high expectations for students' conduct and achievement. Teachers plan tasks carefully to

challenge students, in order to help them extend their learning and deepen their understanding. Where students are taught well, they are given opportunities to regularly review their learning in order to ensure that they are grasping the key ideas before moving on. Teachers capitalise on students' prior knowledge to enable them to link ideas and give their learning coherence. Teaching of this quality was seen in music, and in some aspects of history, English and mathematics. However, these strengths are not typically displayed by all teachers and inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching, both within and between departments. As a result, students' progress is inconsistent. Where teaching has insufficient impact on students' learning, teachers' expectations are not high enough with activities poorly matched to students' levels of understanding. Consequently, tasks lack challenge, are too easy and fail to ignite students' enthusiasm – leading to them becoming disengaged and occasionally disruptive. Evidence from the scrutiny of students' work and observations of teaching reveals that students' misconceptions are not identified quickly enough or effectively dealt with by their teachers. When this happens, students' progress slows.

Questioning is used effectively by some teachers to make students think about what they are learning. This challenges students to give extended answers, providing an indication of how well they understand the work they have been given to do. However, some teachers' questions are undemanding, and only require students to give superficial responses. When this happens, opportunities for students to think hard and formulate answers that develop their oral skills are being missed.

In the sample of students' work scrutinised by inspectors, teachers' marking was compliant with the school's revised marking policy. In the best examples, teachers signpost students to what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work further, which students then act on. When marking is of this quality it has a positive impact on students' learning. However, some teachers' comments lack precision, leading to superficial responses from the students. In these circumstances, the impact of marking on students' progress is not being maximised.

There is evidence that the school's policy to develop literacy across the curriculum is beginning to be implemented effectively. However, there is less evidence of a consistent approach to students applying their mathematical skills in other subjects. As a result, opportunities for students to see the wider relevance of mathematics and consolidate their learning in this subject are being missed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The students are proud of their school. This is reflected in their positive behaviour around the site, smart uniform and polite manners. They treat their learning environment with respect, resulting in a school site that is litter and graffiti free. When their lessons are well planned and they are given activities that make them think, students rise to the challenge and demonstrate strong attitudes to learning,

which in turn accelerates their progress. On the other hand, where teaching is not of this quality students can become disengaged, leading to disruptive behaviour that inhibits learning.

Prior to the start of term, pupil premium funding was used to finance a summer school for disadvantaged students to ease their transition from primary school into Year 7. The positive impact of this initiative continues to be felt. All students who attended the summer school have a record of 100% attendance since the start of the year. This is substantially higher than the attendance of those students who did not avail themselves of this facility.

Attendance issues, highlighted at the time of the September 2014 inspection, are being roundly addressed. The appointment of a full-time attendance officer and the change from a 'vertical' house system to year groups has enabled staff to focus their work on those students who find coming to school challenging. Improved engagement with parents, rigorous monitoring systems and regular analysis of attendance data allied to targeted help for vulnerable students is leading to improved rates of attendance. For example, last year's Year 11 left the school with a rate of attendance over three and a half percentage points higher than the previous year's cohort. The school's records indicate that the current rate of attendance is 95.14%, which is above the latest nationally available average figure.

Those students who spoke with inspectors said that since the appointment of the headteacher behaviour around the school has improved. This is partly due to a new behaviour policy providing clarity to students about the school's expectations for their conduct. This opinion is supported by the school's most up-to-date exclusion figures, which are in decline. However, students went on to say that not all their teachers implemented the policy consistently, for example in class when some students misbehave. When this happens standards of behaviour are not as high as they could be.

Students said that when they experience difficulties they feel well supported by the staff. They particularly value the Links Support Centre, which provides an oasis of calm where students wanting some quiet time can go to talk with staff or their friends or do their homework. If any bullying occurs in school students are confident that it will be sorted out.

The governors ensure that the required checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are carried out. As a result, the single central record of these checks meets statutory requirements, making a positive contribution to students' safety.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school. She has taken decisive action to tackle weaknesses in leadership, management and teaching. The senior leadership team has been restructured and the middle leadership team strengthened by a number of new appointments. The resulting clarification of leaders' and managers' roles and responsibilities is now providing a much sharper focus to their work to improve the school. As a consequence, there has been a welcome rise in students' attendance and improvements in behaviour, and students' progress, particularly at Key Stage 3, is accelerating. However, senior leaders and governors are realistic. They are fully aware that time is needed for the new appointments to become established in their roles in order to ensure they continue to have a sustained impact on students' outcomes. Senior leaders' work to improve the quality of teaching is having a greater impact on outcomes at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4. This is because at Key Stage 4 teachers have the additional task of filling the gaps in students' knowledge and understanding that have arisen as a result of weak teaching in the past. Nevertheless, united behind the headteacher's drive to improve the school, teachers are rising to the challenge of mitigating the impact of these historical weaknesses in classroom practice.

The headteacher has brought much-needed rigour to teachers' performance management. Staff's appraisal objectives are linked to the teachers' standards and adjusted to take into account their experience and responsibilities. This is resulting in governors confidently linking performance management to teachers' pay. Last year, for example, few teachers were awarded a pay rise due to weaknesses in the quality of teaching and students' underperformance at Key Stage 4.

Senior leaders have a secure understanding of how well the school is doing. The written self-evaluation makes clear what senior leaders are doing to improve the school and how staff's energies are being directed to deal with the most pressing priorities. However, in places, the written document tends to be too descriptive and lacks a sharp evaluative edge; not enough emphasis being given to the impact that particular initiatives are having on students' outcomes.

Middle leaders have a much greater role in monitoring the work of their departments than was the case prior to the September 2014 inspection. They have received training to enable them to monitor and evaluate the work in students' books, analyse students' attainment and progress information and make judgements about the quality of teaching. As a result, they hold their colleagues to account for the quality of their work and identify the support needed to bring about improvements in professional practice. However, middle leaders are members of a relatively new team and it is too early to assess their collective impact on students' outcomes.

Since the previous monitoring inspection the arrangements for school governance have been reviewed. As a result, the IEC has been constituted as a committee of the

school's governing body. The IEC's role is to monitor the school's progress against each of the areas for improvement in the September 2014 report. Since its inception the IEC has grasped the nettle, supporting the headteacher in injecting a sense of urgency to the pace of change. Regular meetings of the IEC are enabling governors to hold senior leaders to account for the progress they are making against each of the areas for improvement identified in the September 2014 report. The IEC has also supported the headteacher in making some tough, but nevertheless effective decisions about staffing to improve the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of middle leadership.

The review of the school's use of the pupil premium has been completed since the previous monitoring visit. This has led to this funding being used to provide targeted support for disadvantaged students. As a result, it is beginning to have a positive impact on closing the attainment gaps between this group of students and their peers and improving attendance.

Although the senior leaders are taking effective action, the school remains in special measures because students' outcomes at Key Stage 4 are not high enough, particularly in English and mathematics. The number of new appointments at senior and middle leadership level need to establish themselves in their roles and demonstrate that they have the capacity to bring about sustained and positive improvements in the school.

External support

The local authority in partnership with Dioceses of Chester and Liverpool continues to provide effective help to the school on its journey of improvement. A specialist leader of education is currently supporting the computing department with curriculum planning and development. This support will continue throughout the autumn term and will be subject to regular monitoring to determine its impact. In the light of the weak outcomes in GCSE English last year senior leaders put in place plans to help the new head of department and sought external support to secure improvements in the reliability of teachers' assessments of students' attainment and progress. Furthermore, this additional support will also include improving the quality of teaching so that the needs of all groups of students are being met effectively. Senior and middle leaders have also benefited from jointly observing lessons with local authority and diocesan staff to assure their judgements on the quality of teaching.