

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Claire Jaques
Executive Headteacher
Richard De Clare Community Academy
Parsonage Street
Halstead
Essex
CO9 2JT

Dear Mrs Jaques

Special measures monitoring inspection of Richard De Clare Community Academy

Following my visit with Sebastian Gasse, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 26–27 November 2019, 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 June 2019.

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 newly qualified teachers.

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 Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Annex

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

- As a matter of urgency, improve the school's safeguarding procedures by:
 - ensuring that there are clear processes to report safeguarding concerns and that they are followed up and acted upon immediately
 - improving systems of reporting and recording incidents of poor behaviour so that all behaviour concerns are followed up appropriately and swiftly.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - holding teachers stringently to account for pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics
 - making sure that the impact of all funding, such as SEND funding and the pupil premium funding, is thoroughly evaluated and such funding is used far more effectively
 - ensuring that middle leaders take responsibility for steering improvements and can demonstrate the impact of their work on pupils' progress
 - making sure that the monitoring of teaching leads to rapid improvements
 - providing the governing body with more detailed information about pupils' achievement so that governors are able to hold leaders fully to account
 - using systems effectively to accurately assess pupils' learning
 - providing all staff with appropriate training to support pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils so that these pupils make good and better progress from their starting points
 - ensuring that leaders closely monitor the impact of the training they provide so that they better understand what is working well.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers and leaders use assessment information to plan learning that enables pupils of all abilities to make good progress from their varying starting points
 - all adults have high expectations of what all pupils can achieve
 - teachers provide pupils with regular, additional support and challenge that lead to improvement for all groups of pupils.
- Improve behaviour by ensuring that:
 - all staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour
 - all staff follow a behaviour policy that sets clear rewards and sanctions.
- Improve provision in the early years by ensuring that:

- the Reception provision is developed so that it builds on the good-quality provision seen in the Nursery
- all adults have high expectations of what children can achieve
- clear routines are established so that children know what is expected from them all of the time
- all children are provided with opportunities to make the most progress they can so that more reach a good level of development and those who are capable exceed in more areas of learning.

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

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

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 26 November 2019 to 27 November 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, two groups of pupils, groups of teachers and other staff, the deputy chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust (MAT) and the chair of the MAT intervention board.

Context

Soon after the June 2019 inspection, the headteacher resigned and left the school. Other leaders including the deputy headteacher stood down from their roles.

Since the 1 September, a head of school has been responsible for the day-to-day running of the school. She is seconded from another school in the MAT. An executive headteacher divides her time between this school and one other. The deputy CEO of the MAT also has close oversight of the school. The local governing body has been disbanded. A MAT intervention board has been created, comprising three experienced education professionals from the area. Its job is to monitor progress against the school's improvement plan.

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

Leaders rightly prioritised addressing issues around safeguarding that were identified during the inspection. They have created a culture of safeguarding that was previously missing. They have introduced rigorous systems such as external gates being closed until 8.20am and closed at 8.50am. All staff are now required to wear identity badges. Visitors are required to sign in and are issued with badges, an innovation in this school. Pupils say that they feel safe because doors are locked and staff are visible. Leaders have made changes to the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum. During our lesson visits pupils were learning about how to stay safe given different scenarios.

Records of employment checks are recorded clearly, and employment files are well organised. Staff received safeguarding training at the start of term. Leaders have held the line in cancelling activities and trips where robust safeguarding arrangements were not in place.

Leaders have addressed the most urgent and obvious weaknesses in safeguarding but recognise that there is more work to do. The local authority has carried out a review and will return to monitor the progress made against the review.

A clear behaviour management system has been introduced. Pupils understand and appreciate the new behaviour system. One said, 'I love it.' Pupils see it as fair because everyone knows the consequences of 'being naughty'. Teachers have different approaches to behaviour management. These are generally effective, but some teachers do not check that everyone's attention is focused on them when necessary.

Pupils participate and behave well during assemblies.

Leaders have identified that the previous school environment contributed to poor behaviour out of lessons. Staff, including workers from across the MAT have worked hard to improve the environment. Play equipment has been provided to keep pupils occupied at lunchtime. Pupils comment favourably on this. Year 6 pupils enjoy the responsibility of being play leaders for younger children. Year 6 pupils commented, 'We don't have bullying any more.'

There has been some early training aimed at improving the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. For example, training on questioning has resulted in teachers giving pupils more opportunities to reflect and develop deeper answers. However, much of the training to date comprised necessary introductions to new systems. For example, the new leader for special educational needs (SENCo) has spent a lot of time sorting out systems to enable teachers to do their job effectively. Teachers have been trained in what they need to do to use these systems. The impact in the classroom is not yet evident.

There is an appropriate focus on phonics within the development of reading. Pupils are engaged in activities. Pupils remain on task during small group learning times. Some features of the chosen scheme are used consistently by various adults. As a result, children are using this knowledge to identify and blend sounds. However, in some classes there is little checking of pupils' learning to find mistakes and consider corrections. Some groups of children are engaged in activities that result in little learning. Teachers are not always able to keep an overview of all groups.

More generally and especially in older year groups, some teaching is highly effective. Pupils were able to talk about what they had just learned about natural selection and how it resulted in camels and giraffes. However, especially in younger years, some planning does not consider well enough the order in which things should be taught to help pupils learn. Sometimes pupils are given tasks involving words that they cannot read with too little information to make sense of the task.

There is some improvement evident in the early years. This is most obviously seen in the improved learning environment. It is brighter and pupils sit on new mats. However, pupils still make insufficient progress from their starting points in the early years because the expectations of staff about what children can do are too low. Part of the reason for this is that staff do not check what children can do already and so they do not challenge children with more difficult tasks. The weaknesses in reception found in the previous inspection are seen throughout early years.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders of the MAT had begun to provide additional support to the school before the inspection. They were surprised at the special measures judgement as they did not fully realise the extent of the school's weaknesses. Following the inspection and well before the report was published, the MAT leadership acted decisively and with urgency. The new leadership has a realistic view of the school. Staff at all levels respect their new leaders. These leaders have brought clarity of vision for what needs to be done and have got on with it. MAT leaders have reviewed staff expertise and made changes to subject leadership in response to staff strengths. Parental perceptions of the school are improving.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Rigorous procedures are now in place to ensure that the school is safe and secure.
- Staff are trained in keeping pupils safe and there are clear procedures for recording concerns and checking that concerns raised are acted upon and followed up.
- The school is now a well-ordered place for learning. Pupils and staff like and understand the new behaviour system. It is used consistently. Visitors notice the marked improvement in the behaviour culture.
- The site has been transformed. New carpets for children to sit on, bright displays and play equipment used at lunchtime have all contributed to an increase in pupil and staff pride in the school. Rubbish and clutter have been removed. The outside area, including that used by early years for learning, has been made much more user-friendly. The library is now a welcoming, light and attractive space.
- The support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has been sharpened. The new SENCo has spent a lot of time sorting out systems to enable teachers to do their jobs effectively.
- Training to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom takes place weekly for both teaching staff and support staff. This is beginning to have a positive impact.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- There remains too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching.
- Especially in the younger years, teachers do not check what pupils know or can do and so do not adjust their expectations.
- While essential work has been done to streamline systems and train staff to support pupils with SEND, the impact is not yet visible in lessons.

- Some teachers do not think clearly enough about the order of tasks in lessons or group of lessons to allow pupils to know more and remember more.
- In the early years, adults' expectations of children are still too low. Children still do not know what is expected of them so the use of time is not sufficiently purposeful.
- There is a wide curriculum involving humanities, science and the arts in all classes. The next step is for the newly created subject teams to plan pupils' learning across all subjects in a sequence from the early years to Year 6. This must enable pupils to build on what they have already learned.

External support

Currently support for the school is being provided by schools within the MAT. For example, teaching and non-teaching staff have visited the other school led by the executive headteacher to view the learning environment. Some subject leaders have also visited to see good practice during the school day. Leaders are in the process of identifying where support is most needed and then looking to wider networks of schools to provide that support. Since the inspection, Essex local authority has carried out a review of safeguarding arrangements in the school and a school improvement visit.