

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



25 May 2016

Simon Taylor  
Executive Headteacher  
Morpeth Chantry Middle School  
Mitford Road  
Morpeth  
Northumberland  
NE61 1RQ

Dear Mr Taylor

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Morpeth Chantry Middle School**

Following my visit to your school on 10 May 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and trust directors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you, the head of school and a range of senior and middle leaders to discuss the actions taken to improve the school since the last inspection. I also met trust directors who have recently formed a steering group to specifically monitor the impact of school improvement activities. I undertook learning walks with the head of school. I also met a group of pupils to discuss their learning and any changes they had identified since the last inspection. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, assessment information on current progress and the minutes of

trust meetings. I also examined the recently commissioned review of the use of pupil premium and its subsequent action plan.

## **Context**

A key stage 2 teacher was appointed in January 2016 and a subject leader for mathematics was appointed in April 2016 to cover for maternity leave. A senior leader was given responsibility in January 2016 for the strategic leadership of teaching and learning.

## **Main findings**

Senior leaders and trust directors are acting decisively to address the areas for improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. Significant action has been taken to accelerate improvements in the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of leadership at all levels. Improved self-evaluation systems are providing school leaders and trust directors with more reliable insights into pupils' progress.

Leaders have balanced external support to bring necessary expertise to the improvement process with strategies to strengthen internal capacity. Actions to develop the teaching and leadership skills of staff are ensuring that improvements are sustainable. Collaboration between school staff and external partners is leading to a stronger focus on teaching and learning. A whole-school coaching programme is enabling staff to reflect on their practice and introduce those elements of challenge required to secure improved progress for pupils. This concentration of professional development is long overdue and is leading to a shift in the school's learning culture and a heightened focus on effective teaching.

In addition to these longer term improvement strategies, leaders are addressing more immediate priorities with an appropriate urgency. Professional development has been provided on key issues such as increasing challenge, extended writing and effective working with teaching assistants. As a result, teachers are planning more thoroughly when best to use additional support in the classroom. In addition, there is increasing evidence in books of opportunities for pupils to write at length in subjects such as history, religious studies and science.

While changes are recent, there are emerging signs of impact. In Year 5 English lessons, pupils were challenged to identify and more importantly use high level grammatical features in their writing. They were regularly invited to embrace challenge and 'upskill' pieces of writing. Further challenge was evident in a Year 8 mathematics lesson, where pupils probed complex algebraic problems and the methodologies behind them. This challenge is not consistently evident across the school as some teachers are not setting tasks that probe deeper learning and understanding.

Pupils identified a number of changes since November's inspection. They feel that

teachers expect more of them. These higher expectations are reflected in the improving quality of work in many books.

Leaders have taken considerable action to address inaccuracies in school self-evaluation identified in November's inspection. Leaders have brought in quality assurance teams from beyond its established partners to bring genuine objectivity and challenge to its own procedures. Middle leaders have welcomed this greater responsibility supported by professional development to carry out their roles. Further leadership capacity is being built as the subject leaders for mathematics and English now participate in senior leadership team meetings.

Leaders are addressing the needs of pupils eligible for the pupil premium more rigorously. Following an external review, a detailed action plan is in place. All staff have taken additional responsibilities to mentor pupils eligible for the pupil premium and actions are being taken to strengthen links with parents and improve attendance. There are signs that the attendance for this group of pupils is improving and some of the progress gaps are beginning to narrow.

Trust directors have initiated significant changes to increase their ability to hold leaders to account. Strategic changes to committee structures are leading to more regular progress information, enabling directors to challenge underperformance on a continuous basis. Detailed oversight of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching, including the quality of work in books, is helping to ensure improvements are closely measured and any underachievement promptly addressed.

The outcomes of November's inspection have galvanised leaders into action. Leaders are marshalling considerable resources for improvement from within and beyond the trust and aligning them in a coherent and timely improvement strategy. Projected outcomes for 2016, supported by external moderation, are showing a positive picture, particularly for Year 6 pupils. Leaders now need to embed these developments while providing middle leaders with further training to support their work around improving the quality of teaching and learning.

### **External support**

The school has strengthened existing links with the Three Rivers Trust to develop a strategic approach towards the development of teaching and learning and to improve standards of middle leadership. Further partnerships with teaching schools have heightened awareness of outstanding teaching and informed the professional development programme. A range of further partnerships have helped to verify the accuracy and reliability of assessment. External partnerships have been used to add rigour and objectivity to quality assurance processes, providing leaders and directors with a more accurate picture of the school's performance.

I am copying this letter to the director of the trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**