

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Rachel Pars
Headteacher
Elton Community Primary School
Alston Street
Bury
Lancashire
BL8 1SB

Dear Ms Pars

Special measures monitoring inspection of Elton Community Primary School

Following my visit, with Mr Stephen Rigby, Ofsted Inspector, to Elton Community School on 27–28 February 2018, 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 academy’s previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children’s services for Bury. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2017

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school to enable all pupils to make good or better progress by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of pupils' progress and outcomes
 - improving teachers' subject knowledge so that they are able to show and explain concepts well
 - planning lessons that engage and interest pupils
 - assessing pupils' understanding throughout lessons and adapting teaching where needed
 - ensuring that teachers' explanations and the activities set are appropriately challenging for pupils with different abilities
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length and showing pupils how to structure their writing
 - ensuring that pupils have regular opportunities to explain their reasoning and use and apply their mathematical skills
 - improving the quality of provision in the early years by ensuring that pupils have regular opportunities to develop their number, writing and personal social skills.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance by:
 - rapidly improving the impact of leaders in improving the quality of teaching and learning
 - ensuring that the pupil premium grant is appropriately and effectively spent to rapidly raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils
 - developing the quality of middle leadership so that subject leaders contribute fully to improving teaching and standards in their subject area
 - using performance management more rigorously to hold staff to account for pupils' progress and their leadership responsibilities
 - improving the impact of governors in challenging leaders to bring about rapid improvement
 - increasing pupils' attendance and reducing the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent by engaging parents more effectively
 - ensuring that assessment procedures are robust, leaders identify any underachievement and support programmes are sharp and effective in

raising attainment

- developing current initiatives to improve overall effectiveness of the school so that all pupils make good progress.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 27 February 2018 to 28 February 2018

Evidence

During the inspection, inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, who is also the early years leader, a selection of subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and other members of staff. The lead inspector met with the vice-chair of governors and the chair of the trust board. He also had a discussion with the executive director of education of the trust, who has been supporting the headteacher. He met with eight pupils to find out their views about their education and welfare. Inspectors carried out a combination of short visits and lesson observations in the early years and in all year groups in key stage 1 and key stage 2, some of which were joint activities with the headteacher. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's plan for improvement, records of the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of children. Inspectors analysed pupils' work and the school's own assessment information.

Context

There have been further changes in staffing since the last visit. Two new teachers have been appointed to teach in key stage 1, one of whom is covering a maternity leave. One of these new appointments is a newly qualified teacher. Two existing teachers, including the deputy headteacher, now teach in Year 2 and in a Year 3–4 class.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders are continuing, energetically, with the actions that they put in place before the previous monitoring visit. Their reviewed action plan is much stronger, with more precise success criteria that are linked to pupils' achievement. They have also made some adjustments to their management processes. For example, following an analysis of the school's assessment information in December, leaders have strengthened their procedures for checking on pupils' progress and for holding staff to account. As a result, leaders now review pupils' progress more frequently, which means that teachers are ensuring that those pupils who need to catch up, or require greater challenge in their work, are receiving more timely support. This work is beginning to show some impact, but it is too early to see the difference this is making in raising pupils' achievement.

The headteacher has, again, acted decisively to address staff underperformance. This has resulted in the appointment of a newly qualified teacher, despite the previous recommendation not to appoint such staff. Nevertheless, leaders have put suitable strategies in place to support this teacher's development.

There is convincing evidence that governors now ask more challenging questions to hold leaders to account. These include checking that the school is making effective use of pupil premium funding. Evidence from the school's assessment information shows that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is currently improving. However, governors recognise that there is still much work to do and that the positive impact of their effectiveness still depends on improved outcomes for all pupils, which have yet to materialise.

As well as revising assessment procedures, the headteacher has actively sought support from a local teaching school to bring about further improvement to the teaching of reading and writing. For example, there is now a more focused approach to the teaching of reading, to enable pupils to develop key skills, such as inference. The use of high-quality texts also provides support for pupils to develop their writing skills. However, this is another recent innovation and its effectiveness is yet to be seen.

The headteacher has introduced a more rigorous system for managing the performance of teachers. Teachers now have targets that focus on the achievement of pupils and on the development of specific professional skills that link to the school's improvement plans. There is evidence of some improvements in teachers' practice, but this is not consistently strong enough across different classes.

The chair of the trust board recognises that leaders have put actions into place to support the improvement of pupils' achievement, but that there is still some way to go before these actions result in the school offering an acceptable standard of education.

The leaders of subject other than English and mathematics are growing in confidence and in their ability to fulfil their role. They now carry out checks on the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects and they are developing suitable methods to assess and track pupils' progress. However, the checks that they carry out do not pay enough attention to how securely pupils acquire the appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of subjects. Consequently, subject leaders do not have a sufficiently thorough understanding of pupils' standards in their subject.

The school continues to have the support of the executive director of education. She has an accurate view of the work of school leaders and recognises that they continue to take appropriate and prompt action, while acknowledging that they still need to ensure more rapid progress for pupils. She has reduced her direct involvement as leaders have increased in confidence, and is now available for approximately one day each week to provide support. This includes, for example, being present at the regular meetings to evaluate pupils' progress and supporting leaders to remain focused on the challenges that still face the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Senior leaders have continued with their previous strategies to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and have introduced some new ones. In mathematics, for example, teachers now give greater emphasis to providing work that enables pupils to use their problem-solving and reasoning abilities. However, this is still inconsistent across year groups and sometimes between ability groups in the same year.

Teachers continue to use the school's 'learning journeys', in which pupils choose the level of difficulty at which they begin their independent work. For many pupils, this approach is successful in ensuring that they complete work that provides sufficient challenge. However, there is evidence that some pupils deliberately choose less challenging activities in mathematics, for instance, so they can answer more questions in return for recognition through the school's electronic rewards scheme. Furthermore, the most able pupils are sometimes instructed not to start beyond a predetermined step, which denies them the opportunity to grapple with more demanding concepts.

There are some signs of improvement in pupils' writing. There is a clear emphasis on providing opportunities for pupils to write in a variety of styles, and teachers emphasise the structure and features of different types of writing. In Year 6, there is certainly significant improvement in the quality of writing among pupils of higher and middle ability. However, elsewhere there is still a need to ensure that pupils have a secure understanding of how to incorporate appropriately adventurous vocabulary into their writing.

There is positive evidence from some lesson observations and pupils' workbooks that teachers are now better at planning activities that interest pupils and sustain their attention. There is also evidence that teachers have increasingly secure subject knowledge. However, teachers' expectations of pupils' work are not consistently high enough. The match between learning activities and pupils' abilities is still too variable, especially for the most able pupils.

In the early years, teachers are now developing children's skills more effectively. For example, a group of most-able children, whom the lead inspector observed, learned about number by exploring different coins and using them to solve simple puzzles. The early years leader now has a clearer view of children's progress and provides additional support to boost children's learning as necessary. However, current evidence shows that there is still much work to do to ensure that an increasing proportion of children achieve a good level of development by the end of this school year.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils continue to behave well and their attitudes to learning are mostly positive. Pupils who spoke with the lead inspector said that behaviour is good and that there are few disruptions to their learning. Teachers manage behaviour well. Bullying is rare. They also said that they feel safe in school and that they trust teachers to manage effectively any concerns that they might have.

During lesson observations, inspectors saw behaviour that enabled pupils to engage well with the activities. Conduct is typically good around school.

Leaders continue to grapple with above-average rates of absence and persistent absence. Accurate information available during this visit shows that both of these figures rose in 2017 compared to the previous year. Current figures show that the rates of absence and persistent absence are still above the historic national averages, despite a range of strategies that leaders employ. For example, they provide rewards, such as certificates, for pupils with high attendance. However, there are some factors that affect the attendance figures substantially. This year, so far, nearly one tenth of pupils have left the school and been replaced by new pupils. The attendance of pupils new to the school is some way below that of the whole school. However, leaders are working hard to improve this and give the message to parents and carers that good attendance is essential for their children to make good progress.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders have brought in strategies to ensure a more consistent approach to teaching and learning. These are beginning to show some signs of having a positive impact on pupils' progress, especially in writing. However, leaders recognise that there is still much work to do in order to ensure better outcomes for pupils.

Evidence from the school's own assessment information and from pupils' work shows that the proportion of pupils on track to reach the expected standards for their key stage is still below the national figures for key stage 1 and key stage 2. Furthermore, the proportion of pupils on track to achieve above the standards expected for their age in Years 2 and 6 remains low. Pupils who are disadvantaged perform somewhat better than their non-disadvantaged peers in school, but there is still some distance to travel before they perform as well as other pupils nationally.

Leaders are developing a more thorough approach to assessing and tracking pupils' progress, based on the skills that pupils need to acquire across a range of subjects. However, there is evidence that teachers' expectations are not consistently high enough. In mathematics, for example, in a number of year groups, pupils spend considerable time learning skills and acquiring knowledge that are typically learned and acquired at a younger age. However, this is not the case in Year 2, where the pitch of work is well matched to the age of pupils. Leaders recognise that they must

increase the level of expectation to accelerate progress.

There are some signs of improvement in pupils' writing. In Year 6, pupils of higher and middle ability now make better progress, showing that they can use a range of sophisticated punctuation and write in an engaging style. For example, in writing a fictional narrative, most-able pupils write sentences like, 'Even her dogs could tell she was fuming; she couldn't believe Leah had done that behind her back.' However, this degree of progress has yet to be replicated in other year groups.

External support

Senior leaders have recently acquired support from a local teaching school and a specialist leader of education to help strengthen the teaching of reading. However, there is no evidence that this initiative has had a positive impact because of the short time it has been in place.