

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



19 December 2018

Ms Vikki Lewis
Principal
St Helen's Primary Academy
St Helen's Way
Monk Bretton
Barnsley
S71 2PS

Dear Ms Lewis

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Helen's Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 28 November 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and the trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the academy to become good.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and a group of teachers, three representatives of the multi-academy trust, including the director for primary education, the incoming and outgoing chairs of the governing board and a group of pupils, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation, improvement plan and other documents were evaluated. You and I undertook brief visits to classrooms where we observed learning, reviewed work in pupils' books and talked to pupils about their work. I also observed pupils at breaktime and in the dining hall.

Context

Since the last inspection in September 2017, the school has had three principals and also periods of time without a principal. At these times, senior leaders from other schools have provided support. The current principal took up post in June 2018. The deputy principal was appointed internally in April 2018. During the year, some staff took industrial action. Some classes have experienced frequent changes of teachers.

Since September 2018, there has been a reorganisation of support staff. A family support worker took up post in September 2018. A new assistant principal will start in January 2019, with a focus on supporting improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Previously, the governing board for this school oversaw the work of three local primary schools in the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). In May 2018, it was decided that this school should have its own governing board.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, this school has experienced significant turmoil as a result of frequent changes of leadership. Despite the efforts of the trust and the chair of the governing board to find suitable leadership and provide support for teachers, the school has not made effective progress towards becoming a good school. Most of the areas for improvement identified in September 2017 remain. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment declined last year. In 2018, pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 were significantly below the provisional national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The outcomes for disadvantaged pupils were particularly poor. Pupils' behaviour and attendance did not improve.

However, since your appointment in June 2018, you have made a strong start in stabilising the school. You have a clear improvement plan which includes appropriate actions to start to address the most pertinent areas for improvement. You have set high expectations for the quality of teaching and the behaviour of pupils. Early signs are that your actions are beginning to bear fruit. Green shoots of improvement are evident. Staff and pupils recognise the very positive impact you have had in a short time.

You have plans to increase the capacity at senior leadership level with the appointment of the new assistant principal and the reduction in the teaching load of the deputy headteacher from January 2019. Middle leadership is starting to develop with the appointments of subject and pastoral leaders. You have appointed a key stage 2 behaviour and welfare leader as well as a key stage 2 leader for the curriculum and teaching and learning. There are new leaders for English and the key stage 1 leader has taken responsibility for phonics. These emerging leaders spoke positively of their opportunities to attend courses and observe good practice in other schools. They value the chance you have given them to make decisions and manage their own budgets. The new leaders are developing action plans, but it is too soon to see the impact of this work.

You recognise the need to rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result of detailed monitoring, you know where the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching lie. All teachers have plans to help them improve their practice. These support plans are well thought out, reviewed regularly and provide significant help for teachers. It is too soon, however, to see the full impact of these plans.

AET colleagues contribute significant support for teachers. This is currently focused on phonics and mathematics. During the inspection, staff from other schools were seen working alongside teachers. Teachers value this support and training which provides useful ideas for the learning activities they plan. However, the impact of support and training is at an early stage and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains too variable. The progress of current pupils is insufficient in some classes.

A pupil premium review was carried out last year. Although the spending of pupil premium funding is now itemised, the review had virtually no impact on improving the outcomes or attendance of disadvantaged pupils last year. Leaders rightly recognise that sharpening the school's focus on the deployment of pupil premium funding to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils is a key area for development.

In order to support consistency of teaching at key stage 2, you have purchased new texts to cover all aspects of the core and humanities curriculum. This is one way in which you are aiming to provide greater consistency across the curriculum, even when pupils are taught by temporary teachers. It is too soon to see the impact of these resources on the quality of teaching and learning.

The overall accuracy of assessment has improved because you ensure that pupils' progress information is checked alongside other schools. AET's standardised assessment procedures help to check pupils' learning at formal assessment points. However, the new marking and feedback policy is applied inconsistently. In a few classes, the presentation in pupils' books shows pupils' pride in their work. However, too often expectations are low. Handwriting and presentation are still poor overall.

You have developed new policies alongside teachers, parents and carers. Teachers value this collegiate approach. The new behaviour policy reflects the desire to reward as well as sanction pupils. You have used exclusions to support improved behaviour but recognise that the number of fixed-term exclusions needs to reduce. Pupils and staff told me that behaviour has improved since you started. However, behaviour in lessons is linked to the quality of teaching. Although most pupils were seen to behave well during this inspection, low-level disruption was observed when pupils were insufficiently engaged in their learning, either because work was too easy or because they did not understand what they were expected to do.

You have done much to increase pupils' confidence in the school. You have ensured that staff have undertaken appropriate training in safeguarding. An audit of safeguarding in June 2018 confirmed that statutory requirements are met. Pupils say that they feel safe because they trust you to deal with problems when they arise. However, pupils feel that lunchtime staff do not always deal with falling-out and name-calling as effectively. As a result, although pupils acknowledge that bullying has reduced since you became headteacher, they still report some concerns. You and the trust have taken positive action to ensure the security of the building.

The deputy principal has responsibility for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). She has worked hard to develop the provision for pupils with SEND and taken appropriate action to reduce the number of pupils on the special educational needs register. The needs of SEND pupils are now known in detail. Since the reorganisation of teaching assistants' roles, she has been able to allocate support to each pupil from the most appropriate teaching assistant. The deputy principal monitors the impact of this support. However, overall, the monitoring of the progress of pupils with SEND is underdeveloped.

Attendance has declined since the same time last year and is below the national average, notably for disadvantaged pupils. The attendance of Year 6 pupils is particularly low. The education welfare officer has written a new attendance policy and is preparing guidance for class teachers to use when discussing attendance with pupils. The family support officer works with families where attendance is an issue. It is too soon to see the impact of this work.

Following a review of governance in May 2018, it was decided that this school should have its own governing board. The outgoing chair of the governing board and the incoming chair are working together to bring about this transition. Both chairs, who are members of the trust, are determined to bring about the much-needed change in the school. They work closely with you and other members of the trust and have a helpful schedule for gathering information about the impact of leaders' work on addressing the areas for improvement. The work of the new governing board is at an early stage, but the change in governance structure has added capacity to the leadership of the school.

External support

The trust provides wide-ranging support which is responsive to the particular needs of the school. The trust communicates effectively with you at regular meetings. Trustees have supported the school financially, contributing to the appointment of the new assistant principal, the improved security of the buildings and purchasing curriculum resources. They recognise the challenges leaders face in bringing about much-needed change. The contribution from the trust's human resources team has been particularly beneficial. The trust's support for teachers' work, particularly with

mathematics and phonics, is starting to help you to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching. Support for the deputy principal has helped bring about the improvements in provision for pupils with SEND.

You also have a number of headteacher colleagues who provide support and challenge for different aspects of the headteacher role. As a result, you have a strong network to support your leadership development.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, and the chief executive officer of AET, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector