

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566933
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
ggleaden@cfbt.com



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Mrs Susan Jones
Headteacher
Phoenix Primary School
Birchfield Road
Liverpool
Merseyside
L7 9LY

Dear Mrs Jones

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Phoenix Primary School, Liverpool

Following my visit to your school on 16 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that all staff use the new marking policy consistently.
- continue to investigate how to provide the richest possible outdoor learning experiences for all children and pupils and especially those in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- sharpen the governors' action plan by specifying the detail of actions needed and when these should happen to ensure that rapid development continues.

Evidence

Meetings were held with you, subject leaders for writing, reading, handwriting and mathematics, co-ordinators for special educational needs and early years, pupils, the Chair and vice-chair of Governors and a representative of the local authority. The school's post-Ofsted action plan and other documents were evaluated. Samples of Year 2, 5 and 6 pupils' work were reviewed. Classrooms and the outdoor areas were visited.

Context

Three teachers are on long term absence. A new special educational needs co-ordinator and leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage have been appointed. A governor has resigned and an associate governor appointed. A programme of improvement to the buildings and information technology facilities in the school is continuing.

Main findings

Teaching is improving. Monitoring by leaders following changes in staffing has identified a stronger profile of teaching. Teachers' planning is checked systematically and improvement advice given where needed. Pupils make good use of the displays of words, ideas and examples of good work in every classroom to help them improve their own work and become more independent. The use of information technology to support learning has strengthened. More tablet computers are available. Pupils in the resource base were using this new technology to create a record of their drama work. The very recently installed '4-D room', which provides wall and floor projection of moving images linked to sound, is already being used to good effect. For example, Year 5 pupils were inspired in writing their mystery stories by the atmosphere created there. Work to develop writing more across all subjects is still at an early stage.

A new marking policy has been introduced. However, it is not consistently applied by all teachers. Opportunities to help pupils develop their spelling, punctuation and grammar are not always taken. Where teachers suggest improvements to pupils' work, these are not always followed up by pupils or rechecked by teachers.

Refurbishment of Reception and Year 1 areas continues. Further development is planned later this school year. Adults working with these classes have reduced the amount of direction they give to the children. They are using a clearer system to observe and record how the children are developing. The outdoor play areas are restricted by the layout of the school buildings. Improvements to make the best use of the limited space available are planned.

School leaders have used the inspection findings as part of their continuing work to improve the school. Middle leadership has been strengthened. The new special educational needs co-ordinator is being provided with good support and training. A teacher is now working solely to support children in catching up with their reading. The appointment of the new Early Years Foundation Stage leader has allowed the deputy headteacher to be more involved with whole school priorities. This has included training to ensure that all teachers are confident in their use of data on pupils' progress. Detailed information on the progress of Year 6 pupils is showing that more are meeting their targets. Where this is not happening additional teaching is put in place to help them catch up.

Leaders take a systematic approach to the schools' many improvement priorities. The overall action plan is supported by detailed plans for development in subject areas. The plans are most detailed over a single term but leaders intend to refine them as detailed information about improvement in the quality of teaching builds.

An external review of governance has been completed. This has led to an action plan for the Governing Body. This plan identifies priorities for development but does not provide sufficient detail of the precise actions needed. It has the same, three month, timescale for all actions to be completed. This does not allow a staged approach to development. Governors are more confident about evaluating their own strengths and weaknesses. The governing body has been strengthened and the range of experience represented extended by the appointment of a new associate governor. The Chair of Governors and the headteacher have attended training together on key issues such as the use of additional funding and the management of staff performance. Governors are increasingly involved in the school, for example, in discussion with pupils on the new playground equipment and markings.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority continues to provide strong, effective support alongside challenge. This involves the headteacher and governors being closely monitored to ensure the school makes the rapid improvement required. Consultants are providing whole staff training and support to individual teachers in literacy and mathematics. This is contributing to the improvement in teaching. The school has engaged specific support from experienced leaders and teachers for members of staff with new roles.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

David Selby

Her Majesty's Inspector