

Tribal
1–4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 3115307
Direct email: rachel.evans@tribalgrou.com



3 July 2014

Mrs Tina Dunkley
The Acting Headteacher
Palfrey Junior School
Dale Street
Walsall, WS1 4AH

Dear Mrs Dunkley

Special measures monitoring inspection of Palfrey Junior School

Following my visit with Gavin Jones, Additional inspector, to your school on 1–2 July 2014, 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching to be at least good by ensuring teachers:
 - assess accurately pupils' learning in order to plan and adapt lessons that match their abilities
 - have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly the more able
 - provide a brisker start to lessons and deploy teaching assistants more effectively to support pupils' learning
 - provide activities that better hold the interest and attention of pupils
 - correct pupils' mistakes in punctuation, spelling and basic grammar consistently.

- Raise achievement in mathematics and in writing by ensuring that:
 - pupils are fully challenged in the tasks they are given and are provided with suitable opportunities to investigate and learn for themselves, particularly the more able
 - pupils understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - pupils are provided with ample opportunities to practise and develop their basic skills in grammar, punctuation, spelling and writing at length across a range of subjects
 - pupils are taught basic mathematical concepts so they can reason logically and solve mathematical problems
 - gaps in attainment are closed rapidly for pupils supported through pupil premium and for those with special educational needs when compared with other pupils in the school.

- Improve the quality and impact of leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - the governing body has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, especially the achievement of different groups of pupils, and provides rigorous challenge that effectively holds senior leaders to account
 - the governing body reviews regularly all required statutory policies
 - leaders at all levels consistently check on the quality of teaching and provide feedback that helps teachers to improve their lessons
 - leaders are more effective in sharing the good practice that exists in the school

- senior leaders use accurate assessments to track the progress of different groups of pupils in order to identify and tackle any underachievement and hold teachers to account for the progress of the pupils in their classes.

An external review of governance should be undertaken, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1–2 July 2014

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, your senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and other members, and spoke to two representatives from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Inspectors also met with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) and the subject leaders for literacy and numeracy. We made 17 visits to classrooms across Years 3, 4, 5 and 6. During these observations inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books and spoke to them about their learning. In addition, I reviewed the information the school has on pupils' progress and the governors' minutes of meetings. Additional documentation was scrutinised, including the local authority's amended plans for supporting the school, information about pupils' attendance and the vetting checks on staff new to the school.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection one teacher working part-time in Year 5 has retired. The local authority has applied to the Department for Education to put in place an interim executive board (IEB). The substantive headteacher has not returned to the school. The deputy headteacher remains as acting headteacher.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since the last inspection, pupils are making better progress in most year groups because they are experiencing more effective teaching over time, particularly in English and mathematics. In Year 3, pupils are making expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics and over a third of the year group are making good progress in reading and mathematics. In Year 4, progress is similarly positive in reading and mathematics. However, progress in writing is slower. This is also the case in Years 5 and 6. School leaders are aware of this and are providing training for staff and interventions for pupils. The quality of writing seen in pupils' books in all year groups in all subjects shows that these actions are improving the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils' progress in Year 5 is slower than that seen in other year groups, particularly in writing and mathematics. However, effective teaching and intervention for pupils' falling behind is ensuring that Year 5 pupils are starting to make the progress expected of them.

Information provided by the school shows that the percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard at the end of Year 6 has increased in reading, writing and mathematics compared to 2013. An increased number of pupils are achieving Level 6 in mathematics.

The school has introduced tests to assess pupils' reading and comprehension ages. These tests revealed that, in December 2013, almost half of all pupils had reading ages below their birthday age. Recent follow-up tests show that this number has decreased particularly in Years 3 and 4.

The school is making progress closing the gaps in achievement between different groups, such as those in receipt of additional government funding, known as pupil premium, and those who are not. Boys are making noticeably better progress because of improvements made to the curriculum, for example the use of a commercially produced reading scheme aimed at encouraging boys to read.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved since the inspection in November 2013. Observations and a scrutiny of pupils' work show that teaching enables the majority of pupils to make reasonable progress.

When teaching is particularly effective, teachers' good subject knowledge and accurate assessment of pupils' abilities are used to plan learning opportunities that are matched to their needs and engage their interest. However, in some instances more-able pupils are given work that fails to stretch their capabilities. As a consequence, their progress is inhibited.

Staff have received training on how to provide effective feedback to help pupils improve their work. Teachers' questioning and verbal and written feedback enable the majority of pupils to correct mistakes, better understand the work and to develop thinking skills. However, where teaching is less effective teachers rely too heavily on a small number of pupils to provide the answers. Pupils stated that they find the teachers' comments helpful in improving their work.

Pupils' writing skills have improved as a result of a focus on the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils are given opportunities to practise these skills in all subjects, for example in topic work and science. However, teachers' marking of pupils' writing is inconsistent. As a result, a minority of pupils repeatedly make the same grammatical, spelling or punctuation mistakes in their work.

In mathematics, pupils are developing wide-ranging number skills. In the majority of visits to classrooms, pupils are given numerous opportunities to use and apply these skills, for example in handling money, investigating number patterns and problem-solving. The majority of pupils are adept at using strategies such as breaking complicated calculations down into more manageable sums to solve problems. However, a minority of pupils rely too quickly on the teacher or teaching assistant to provide help or answers.

In the more effective teaching, additional adults are carefully directed by the class teacher, with the result that pupils of all abilities make reasonable progress. Pupils' needs are more accurately identified, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium. These pupils are receiving interventions that are specific to their needs and helping them to close the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well around the school and in most lessons. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and work in pupils' books is well-presented, accurate and completed. Pupils say that teachers manage behaviour well. However, pupils' behaviour deteriorates when teaching fails to provide challenge or interest. Pupils' attendance is in line with national figures. Pupils say they feel safe and that bullying is rare and quickly tackled by staff.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The improvements in the quality of learning and teaching and in the progress pupils make are evidence that leaders are effective in their roles. The roles and responsibilities of subject and phase leaders have been clarified. Checking and inclusion arrangements have been improved because some leaders, for example the SENCO, have been given a reduced teaching commitment. Systems are now in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and pupils' progress, and subject and phase leaders, including the SENCO, are more involved in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. As a result, teachers are given tailored training to improve their practice and intervention is swiftly implemented for pupils who are not making reasonable progress.

Teachers are held to account for the progress of pupils in their class through observations, regular analyses of information about pupils' progress, monitoring of pupils' work in books and subsequent pupil progress meetings. The recently introduced 'Teacher profile', a record of a teacher's strengths and areas for improvement, shows that school leaders' judgements of the quality of teaching are accurate and enable teachers to identify how to improve. Teachers say that they are now much clearer about how to set work at the right level. The Teacher profile has been used to identify individual teachers and teaching assistants who demonstrate effective practice in particular areas such as questioning. As a result, members of staff are asked to lead training or support colleagues whose practice is less effective. Staff say this approach has raised morale as good practice has been recognised and a feeling of togetherness achieved.

The school's self-evaluation form (SEF) is accurate and informed by a range of information about the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Appropriate areas for development are identified in the SEF and these are included in the school's

improvement plan. Actions in the plan are suitable and clearly focused on the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in November.

Changes to the range of subjects on offer have increased pupils' enjoyment and engagement in learning and are reinforcing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.

Governors initially responded positively to the recommendations in the November 2013, section 5 inspection report. However, this has not been sustained. Governors' perceived confusion over the IEB start date has meant that some individual governors have stopped carrying out their roles and responsibilities. The Chair of the Governing Body and remaining members have continued to support the school through, for example, reviewing essential policies and agreeing and signing off the 2014–15 financial plans. Safeguarding checks meet current requirements. However, challenge to and support for the acting headteacher have been absent since June 2014. The local authority has put in place measures to ensure the school receives support such as improvement review meetings and support from two improvement advisers. These measures have been particularly successful in supporting the development and effectiveness of subject and phase leaders. School leaders stated that this support has ensured the focus on improving pupils' achievement has been maintained.

The proposed start date for the IEB is before the end of the summer term. It is essential that this board provides support to the acting headteacher and quickly resolves the uncertainty surrounding the substantive headteacher and deputy headteacher posts so that the current momentum in improving pupils' outcomes is not lost.

External support

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection the local authority has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. However, the local authority has not always been proactive in supporting the school and the acting headteacher. The continued delay in the introduction of the IEB has jeopardised the progress the school has made to date. The local authority has commissioned improvement advisers to work with school leaders. This has been effective in improving senior and middle leaders' monitoring, evaluation and review of the school's work. The quality of pupils' writing in Year 6 has been moderated by the local authority.

School leaders and administrative staff continue to benefit from the support of a local secondary academy.