

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

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 6188524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566857

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jkinsman@cfbt.com



11 May 2015

Miss Linda Pennington
Headteacher
Alexandra Infants' School
Melville Road
Normacot
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST3 4PZ

Dear Miss Pennington

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Alexandra Infants' School

Following my visit to your school on 8 May 2015, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- share the good practice in teaching which now exists within the school so that all teaching becomes good or better
- use information about pupils' achievement to prioritise leaders' monitoring activities
- ensure that when evaluating teaching, leaders focus on the impact of teachers' actions on pupils' progress
- make sure that pupil premium funding is being used effectively to narrow gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates
- ensure that governors provide appropriate challenge and hold school leaders to account for their work in improving teaching and accelerating pupils' progress
- improve attendance and tackle persistent absence.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders and with three representatives of the Governing Body. I met with a representative of the local authority and the National Leader of Education (NLE) who is providing support to the school, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I made brief visits to lessons and looked at the work in a small sample of books. I reviewed information about pupils' achievement and the records kept following your monitoring of the work of teachers. In addition, I met with the home school link worker and a governor to discuss the actions being taken to improve attendance.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in October 2014, two teachers with leadership responsibilities have left the school. One new teacher joined the school in January. In the spring term, six of the seven classes were taught by supply teachers. In April 2015, a new deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher joined the school along with a new class teacher. A further temporary unqualified teacher has also recently been appointed. Five teaching assistants have left the school.

Main findings

Continuing instability in staffing has had a significant detrimental impact on the school's capacity to improve. Some classes have had several changes in teacher since the previous monitoring inspection. This lack of continuity has limited leaders' ability to ensure that planned improvements in teaching are made in all classes and this has slowed pupils' progress.

Pupils' attainment remains low overall. There are wide variations in the progress and attainment of different groups of pupils. For example, boys underachieve in comparison to girls. Gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates are wide and show little sign of narrowing.

In some classes, teachers do not ensure that the work set is appropriate for pupils of different ability. This means that some pupils find the work easy while others struggle to understand what they have to do. Some tasks do not match the purpose of the lesson and this limits pupils' progress.

Your monitoring of teaching has been too focused on what teachers and other adults are doing in lessons, rather than on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. With the support of the NLE, you have made improvements to the way that information about pupils' achievement is organised and presented but you are not using this information to prioritise and plan which aspects of teaching and learning you need to check or improve

The NLE has worked with you to update the school policy for marking and you are checking that teachers are following the policy consistently. However, the feedback given to pupils by teachers does not always focus on the correct next steps which will help pupils to make the most progress.

You and the governors have increased your efforts to promote good attendance and are now following up absences more rigorously. However, this work has had little impact and attendance remains well below the national average for primary schools. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent remains high. The recent work of the home school link worker and a bilingual learning mentor has resulted in significantly improved attendance for a very small number of pupils.

You have made improvements to the way that incidents of poor behaviour are recorded and have organised two reviews of behaviour by representatives of the local authority's behaviour support service. You have used the findings to make improvements to lunchtime and playtime arrangements and as a result there has been a reduction in the number of incidents of poor behaviour.

The very recent appointment of a new deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher has brought additional capacity to the leadership team. These leaders have already begun to have a positive impact on the progress of pupils in their classes. They have a clear understanding of the key weaknesses in pupils' achievement and in teaching across the school and have some well-thought-out ideas about how these can be tackled. However, it is too soon to evaluate the impact of their work on raising standards across the school.

Governors have not ensured that pupil premium funding is used effectively to narrow gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others. The governing body has focused on the need to bring stability to staffing and to support you as headteacher. However, governors acknowledge that they have not provided sufficient challenge regarding the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

I intend to return to the school to carry out a further monitoring inspection and provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority is providing extensive support to this school. The seconded director of learning has worked with you during a period when there were no other senior leaders in the school. The NLE commissioned by the local authority has supported you in restructuring staffing and has provided support and training for a new teacher and for teaching assistants. She has helped you to make improvements to the way that you organise and present information about pupils' progress and to the structure of your reports to governors. In addition the local authority has

commissioned coaching services from a local teaching school and has carried out reviews of behaviour. You and the governors acknowledge that during this time of instability in staffing, you have relied heavily on this good support. The local authority and governors are considering options to bring sustained and increased capacity to leadership and governance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel

Her Majesty's Inspector