

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



5 November 2015

Ms D Russell
Headteacher
Langdale Primary School
Langdale Road
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Staffordshire
ST5 3QE

Dear Ms Russell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Langdale Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 November 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2014. 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders and middle managers, the Chair of governors and two other governors, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and notes of recent governing body meetings scrutinised. External reports by the local authority, and the results of a review of governance were examined. The inspector visited several Key Stage 2 classrooms with the headteacher to sample teaching and learning, talk to some pupils and look at their written work.

Context

The previous headteacher retired at the end of December 2014. The school was then led by an acting headteacher for two terms. A new headteacher took up post in September 2015. The governing body reconstituted its structure ready for September 2015. A local leader in education (LLE) has been supporting the school on behalf of the local authority (LA) since February 2015, and has been retained as a source of advice for the new headteacher this term.

Main findings

The independent review of governance requested as a result of the recent inspection identified a substantial number of weaknesses and made recommendations on what needed to be done to resolve these shortfalls. New governors with no school connections have been recruited. This is a work in progress, with an ongoing need to review the relevance of some of the many scheduled meetings, but the direction of travel is correct. There is a new structure to systematically assign governors to take oversight of different aspects of the school's work, such as subject link governors. Governors have new, written expectations of their role and are expected to report on their work to the Chair of governors regularly, which is helping to ensure governors play their own part in accountability for school improvement.

The new headteacher has quickly and accurately assessed the school's key strengths and weaknesses, and reported these to governors. She has written a succinct development plan that addresses these weaknesses and is linked to targets for pupil achievement and the quality of teaching. The plan includes half-termly milestones that allow leaders to monitor progress towards the end-of-year targets. Middle leaders have clear roles and share ambitious targets for raising the achievement of pupils in the school, and as one said 'We are committed to ensuring every pupil achieves their age-related expectations, year by year.' These new leaders have been well trained in how to monitor the quality of teaching and learning through LA consultant support and in partnership with the LLE's school. They are contributing to a collegiate view on the quality of teaching and learning across the school. A new tracking system linked to progress towards these expectations makes it clear to teachers what pupils are expected to achieve in detail, and highlights individual pupils' journeys in a way that steers additional support. In the previous academic year, middle leader training in monitoring and evaluation led by the LLE's school alongside LA consultants has helped these leaders quickly develop their skills; they are relishing their new responsibilities.

The areas for improvement identified at the recent inspection are being tackled well. Teachers are providing work designed to challenge pupils, including the most able. In some instances, however, some pupils struggle to fully understand the task thereby revealing some underlying misconceptions. This is because of previously inaccurate assessment of what pupils can do. The headteacher is well aware of this and has required all classes to undertake a 'benchmarking' assessment this term to

try and secure a reliable measure of pupils' actual attainment. In other lessons, teachers force the pace of the lesson too quickly for every pupil to have chance of thinking for themselves, resulting in incomplete work. Both of these examples show the need for further improvements in the way teachers adapt their practice to meet the strengths and needs of their pupils as the lesson proceeds.

Pupils have taken to the new 'accelerated reader' scheme with gusto. It has not been in place long enough to show in the external reading tests. The very positive attitude shown by pupils to reading whole books then showing their comprehension of the story through tests is a good sign that the programme is on track to improve reading. There are equally good signs that pupils enjoy writing, thanks to increasingly interesting contexts designed to add a 'wow' factor to the writing theme. National Curriculum assessments in 2015 results show similar outcomes at Key Stage 1, compared to 2014, and improvements at Key Stage 2, especially in writing. In mathematics at Key Stage 2, the attainment of pupils improved, as did the progress they all made from starting points. There is also much better marking and feedback to pupils, with most pupils responding to the improvement advice.

A new early years leader has successfully addressed the requirement to use ongoing assessment to direct teaching, leading to better provision in this stage. The recently appointed pupil premium lead teacher has good information on each pupil eligible for this support, as do class teachers, but there is more to be done to identify exactly what each pupil needs in order to catch up with their non-disadvantaged peers. The gap did not close much in 2015.

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

External support

The local authority has provided good support to the school, beginning with a hard-hitting evaluation of the school's effectiveness just before the recent inspection, followed by brokering the support of a local leader in education. The latter's work supported the school's improvement during the prolonged recruitment of a substantive headteacher. She and the LA have steered the governing body in this process very well, securing effective long-term leadership for the school and helping the governing body to regain a strategic rather than operational responsibility for the school. The training of middle leaders, and the sharing of good practice via the LLE's school, is rapidly making improvements to teaching and learning.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector