

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



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Mrs Annabel Stoddart
Headteacher
Abbot Beyne School
Linnell Building
Osborne Street
Burton-on-Trent
DE15 0JL

Dear Mrs Stoddart

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Abbot Beyne School

Following my visit to your school on 25 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 May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 you and other senior leaders, representatives from the governing body and a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Short visits were made to four Key Stage 3 mathematics lessons carried out jointly with the subject leader for mathematics, followed by a conversation about teaching and learning in this area. The Ofsted action plan and the school improvement plan were evaluated together with a range of other documentation including information on the use of strategies to raise achievement and the school's own analyses of pupils' outcomes.

Context

Since the last inspection there have been no significant changes to the school or to staffing.

Main findings

Leaders, including governors, are driven by a commitment to improve the school further and make certain that the quality of education pupils receive during their time here is the best it can be. As a result, decisive action has been taken to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Greater rigour has been introduced to systems already in use, and new approaches have been adopted where systems were less effective. School leaders know the school well and you are aware that the two areas requiring greatest improvement are the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and achievement in mathematics.

Pupils at Key Stage 4 now make better progress than they have in recent years and your indications for the current Year 11 suggest this is likely to continue. The proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C in 2015 increased to above the national average. In mathematics, the proportion of pupils making expected progress in 2015 increased substantially and is now similar to that seen nationally. In English, more pupils than the national average made the progress they should in 2015. Teachers' assessments at Key Stage 4 are accurate and leaders are now confident that the information they are given on pupils' attainment is correct. This confidence has enabled you to reliably identify any pupils in Years 10 and 11 who are underachieving, and to provide tailored support to help them to catch up.

Greater coherence and rigour have been introduced to the way in which you assess pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 and use this information to improve their learning. Diagnostic tests are taken by all pupils each half term, rather than termly. Teachers quickly intervene at the first sign of progress slowing, and plan work to fill identified gaps in learning. Teachers check on the impact of this work at the next assessment point and swiftly change the strategy used if it is not working, so that pupils catch up quickly.

The use of pupil premium funding was reviewed very quickly following the last inspection. You have acted on suggestions from this review and have clarified senior leaders' roles to increase the level of accountability for leading on work to improve achievements for all pupils, but especially those who are disadvantaged. A clearly defined structure is now in place showing how pupils are supported across the school. Disadvantaged pupils are allocated a mentor who becomes their named point of contact to review their progress and to keep their parents informed of progress. Strategies used to help disadvantaged pupils to catch up are reviewed every six or seven weeks to make sure that the gaps in attainment and progress for these pupils, compared with others in the school, are narrowing while providing value for money.

Pupils identified as having weak literacy skills receive an additional lesson in literacy, known as 'literacy plus', instead of studying a modern foreign language. Most of these pupils are well supported through an 'accelerated reader' programme but the weakest readers, who need a phonics (the sounds letters make) approach, do not receive the support they need to help them to improve their reading.

Improvements to teaching in mathematics are leading to pupils making better progress than was the case at the time of the last inspection, particularly at Key Stage 4. Weaknesses in teaching remain in Key Stage 3 mathematics. To develop the skills needed for the new GCSE, the subject leader of mathematics has written and introduced a new scheme of work for pupils, based on a five-year plan. Although the curriculum is well planned and provides suggested resources to use, teachers do not always deliver this curriculum in the most effective way to make sure that pupils master the mathematical concepts. From lessons visited during the inspection, the subject leader acknowledged that inconsistencies were seen in teaching. Year 7 pupils were seen doing work that was too easy, as teachers had not planned work which built on what some pupils already knew about using the symbols of inequality. Although the need to show the correct working out was emphasised in a Year 7 lesson on solving equations, this was not modelled well, which led to some pupils failing to set their work out properly. Pupils in Year 9 spent too long explaining a simple concept they had already grasped, and did not have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of their work on surface area and volume. From her checks on pupils' work in books, the subject leader has identified a weakness in the way teachers mark work. Some of the 'ebi' (even better if) statements are not sharply focused on filling gaps in learning, and focus on effort, or tell pupils the next topic in the scheme of work.

You have a school improvement plan and a separate Ofsted action plan, both of which governors use to monitor the progress made by the school. The format of the Ofsted action plan demonstrates a robust approach to monitoring as staff leading actions are named and different leaders are responsible for monitoring these actions and checking on the quality of the work. 'Milestones' are very clearly, and numerically, defined and this document is a useful tool to see how quickly the school is improving. Governors use their knowledge, and the evidence presented to them, to colour code the impact of the actions using the 'milestones' so that they know where there is still work to do. The separate school improvement plan does not reflect the same level of rigour and cannot be used to hold people to account where the desired impacts are not achieved.

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 is confident in the capacity of senior leaders to improve the school and, as a result, has rightly reduced the level of support it provides to the school from 'medium' to 'low'. Further support is required for leadership in mathematics to continue to improve teaching, learning and assessment in this area.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector