

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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



27 January 2016

Mrs Anne Tapp  
Headteacher  
Picknalls First School  
Oldfields Road  
Uttoxeter  
Staffordshire  
ST14 7QL

Dear Mrs Tapp

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Picknalls First School**

Following my visit to your school on 12–13 January 2016, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2015.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

#### **Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.**

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

The school's development plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Stuart Bellworthy  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2015**

- Improve leadership, management and safety by ensuring that school leaders always undertake appropriate risk assessments of the suitability of volunteers to work in the school.
  
- Improve the quality of teaching further and accelerate progress in English by ensuring that:
  - work in lessons consistently challenges all groups of pupils, particularly the most able, so that they engage in their learning and make faster progress
  - teachers check that pupils respond to the advice that they give them when they mark their work
  - spelling skills are taught more effectively and pupils consistently apply the skills they learn in phonics lessons to their writing tasks.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12–13 January 2016**

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, the work of the school was seen in action, documents were scrutinised and teaching was observed in all classes. Her Majesty's Inspector met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leaders, a group of pupils, parents, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

### **Context**

Since the previous inspection the vice-chair of the governing body is now the Chair of the Governing Body.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Pupils' outcomes are variable over time and across different groups of pupils. Early years continues to be a strength of the school. Most children start school with skills that are broadly in line with those typical for their age. Some children start school with typically lower skills, especially in speech and language development. Outcomes at the end of Reception remain in line or above the national average for all groups of children, which represents effective progress. Pupils' phonics (letters and the sounds they make) outcomes in Year 1 have continued to improve and are now above the national average for all groups except girls. Girls' phonics outcomes were above the national average in 2014 and equal to the national average in 2015. Pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 fell in 2015 to below the national average. This was particularly the case for boys, disadvantaged pupils and the most-able pupils. Girls were more successful in 2015 and achieved better outcomes, which were equal to or above the national average for girls in reading, writing and mathematics. The gap between disadvantaged and other pupils in the school achieving the expected level at the end of Year 2, narrowed slightly in 2015.

The school's current progress information shows that pupils in all year groups are making progress, although there is still variability in different year groups and pupil groups. Progress is stronger in early years, reading and mathematics, but weaker in writing, especially for disadvantaged pupils. The changes made by leaders and teachers have not yet improved pupils' outcomes enough, especially in writing and for disadvantaged pupils.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Pupils and parents speak warmly of the time and effort the teaching staff put into helping pupils progress. Monitoring of the teaching of mental mathematics took

place in the autumn term, which identified some strengths and some areas which need further work. The headteacher and Her Majesty's Inspector together visited all classrooms during the inspection. Many positive aspects were observed such as the high level of pupil engagement in lessons and an improved focus on phonics and spelling across the school. Adults are usually used well, although leaders need to ensure that the teaching resources used to support disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and disabilities are effective at closing the gaps in progress and outcomes. Some pupils' workbooks show effective progress since September and pupils responding to teachers' feedback, as stated in the school's policy. However, this is not yet consistent across the school and is closely linked to the variability shown in pupils' progress so far this academic year. Teachers' expectations of pupils, including the most able, are not typically high enough to enable rapid progress. Leaders agree that there now needs to be a sharper focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that their own assessments of teaching are accurate and all pupil groups are making effective progress from their starting points.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Pupils behave well and are keen to learn. Pupils' conduct in lessons is good, as they are keen to improve their skills. They know the school's values, which are reinforced in assemblies and displays around the school. Pupils treat all adults with respect, including parent volunteers and student teaching assistants. For example, in corridors and when coming into assembly, pupils walk sensibly and quietly.

Pupils arrive at school on time in a calm and orderly fashion. Parents have accepted the new safeguarding systems readily, which include having different school entry and exit points for the younger and older pupils. This system enables the school staff to monitor who is entering and leaving the school site much more closely. Whole-school attendance was just above the national average in 2015. Whole-school attendance this academic year is in line with last year's figures. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still below other pupils in the school, although above the national average for disadvantaged pupils in 2015. The headteacher is aware of the need to work closely with parents of those pupils with lower attendance. National research shows that there is close link between attendance and pupils' progress.

The group of pupils who spoke to Her Majesty's Inspector say school is fun and the teaching is more challenging now. They explained that the school council and prefects listen to the other pupils and help improve the school. Pupils say that problems with other pupils are rare, but when they do occur, staff resolve issues quickly. The pupils spoken to have some understanding of fundamental British values such as democracy and how laws are enforced, although this aspect of their preparation for life in modern Britain is not yet fully developed.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The headteacher has created a culture of openness and honesty. Parents, staff and governors respect this and appreciate the steps leaders have taken to regain parents' trust following the safeguarding concerns found at the last full inspection. Parents who spoke to Her Majesty's Inspector during this monitoring visit were very supportive of the school's work and say their children are happy and well cared for at school. Pupils are equally positive and say that they 'have the best headteacher there is!' Leaders demonstrate the drive, ambition and commitment needed to improve the school and enable pupils to make the progress they are capable of. Senior leaders work together well and understand the steps needed to further develop the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, to produce more consistent outcomes for pupils.

Leaders and managers have been rightly focused on improving safeguarding as the top priority. Safeguarding is now stronger and the more rigorous measures are supported by pupils, parents and the local authority. A good example of this is a new system where two staff who are designated safeguarding officers and a governor need to ensure that the correct checks have been carried out before a volunteer can work in the school. Leaders put an appropriate action plan together to improve safeguarding following the previous inspection and worked closely with the local authority to complete an audit in September 2015. Nearly all actions included in the plan have been completed as a result of the headteacher's drive to rapidly improve all aspects of safeguarding.

The school's improvement plans are fit for purpose and include all of the recommended areas for improvement identified at the last full inspection. In addition to safeguarding, progress is also evident in the teaching of phonics and spelling. While improvements have been made, progress is less consistent in the impact of teachers' feedback to pupils and ensuring that teaching enables all pupil groups to progress well. Leaders now need to target teaching resources more effectively, using their analysis of recent assessment information.

Governors know the school well and minutes of their meetings demonstrate they hold the school leaders to account. The new chair of governors works closely with the headteacher and visits the school regularly. Governors have ensured that parents can raise any concerns easily and have provided resolutions quickly. Governors check some aspects of the school's work well, such as the provision for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities, but agree that not enough monitoring of the school's improvement plans has taken place to date. Her Majesty's Inspector pointed out that although some aspects of the school's website meet the Department of Education's minimum requirements, some statutory information for parents is missing or not clear. Leaders and governors agreed to work on the website to ensure that it is fully compliant.

## **External support**

Staffordshire local authority has supported the school well since the previous inspection. Representatives have attended parents' meetings, completed a safeguarding audit and provided ongoing support for the school. This has included a visit in September 2015 to review teaching and learning across the school with the headteacher and ongoing English liaison with the subject leader to support the work to improve the teaching of phonics and spelling. The local authority has also checked the school is receiving support from other local schools for the other recommended areas for improvement outlined in the annex above. The local authority agrees that the school has made important improvements and that further work is still needed to reduce the variability in different year groups and pupil groups. The local authority plans to continue the regular review visits with the school.