

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



10 February 2016

Mr C Haley
Principal
St Mary's CofE Primary Academy
Trinity Avenue
Mildenhall
Bury St Edmunds
IP28 7LR

Dear Mr Haley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's CofE Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 4 February 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2015. 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 last section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and one other member of the governing body to discuss the actions being taken to improve the academy. I scrutinised a range of documents and visited every classroom. I also looked at pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their work.

Context

Since the last inspection, eight new teachers have joined the academy in September 2015 and there are two ongoing maternity leaves. Therefore, the complement of teachers that are new to the school is considerable, six of those being newly

qualified teachers. The inexperience of the teaching staff is a challenge for leaders and one that you have faced head on. Governors agreed to fund many of these teachers for an early start in the summer. As a result, teachers know well the school's routines and expectations and induction was thorough, all of which was evident during my visit.

You and your leaders have undertaken considerable work with your new team, to ensure that the learning environment and conditions for learning are of a consistently sound quality throughout the academy. Displays of pupils' work, familiarity with prompts to support learning and behaviour management all aid a good working ethos.

Main findings

Despite your obvious disappointment at the outcome of the previous inspection, senior leaders and governors have responded positively to the findings. You have written a development plan for this academic year to address all of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Each action in the plan has success criteria. However, these are not always readily measurable. The result is that leaders and governors are not able to check if the action taken has directly contributed to improvements in pupils' progress.

Leaders continually evaluate the school's progress towards its key priorities. The self-evaluation is comprehensive in its reflection on the previous inspection findings. However, there is little by way of evidence to show the rapid progress needed to become a good school. It is therefore difficult to ascertain from where judgements of 'good' for teaching, learning, assessment and leadership and management arise. Working closely with you and your senior leaders during my visit was helpful in coming to a common understanding of these aspects.

In 2015, pupils made poorer progress than in 2014 from the end of Key Stage 1 when they achieved above the national average. Year 6 pupils' attainment was below that expected in reading, writing and mathematics. However, disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 2 attained broadly in line with this group nationally and with their peers. This group's progress from the end of Key Stage 1 was similar to their peers in reading and writing and slightly above in mathematics. Not enough of all pupils in Year 6, however, made more than expected progress when compared with the national average.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2015 was similar to the national average in reading and mathematics but was below average in writing. Disadvantaged pupils did not attain as well as this group nationally, in reading, writing or mathematics. The proportion of pupils who reached the expected level in the phonics screening check in Year 1 was below the national average. In the early years in 2015, the proportion of children who reached a good level of development was in line with the

national average. From a low starting point, these children made good progress during their time in Reception and were well prepared for Year 1.

The focus of leaders' work since the last inspection has rightly been on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Despite the recruiting difficulties that the school has encountered, the quality of teaching is improving, as can be seen by leaders' monitoring since September. However, as the complement of teachers is so different from July 2015, it is not possible to say that teaching has improved since then. What is clear, however, is that leaders have the capacity to ensure that teachers improve their own practice, and are supported to do so, and that this is having a direct impact on pupils' learning and achievement. It is already evident in mathematics that pupils are making at least expected progress across the school and, in some classes, more than expected. The school's chosen assessment system is still developing and teachers' assessments are still cautious. However, work in pupils' books and learning seen during my visit, confirm that progress is being made. Additional adults support well, addressing any misconceptions and encouraging pupils to think hard about what they already know and what they are learning. In some classes, however, the most-able pupils do not attempt the higher levels of work that teachers provide. As a result, pupils do not always challenge themselves and adults do not encourage them to do so. Consequently, time was wasted in some lessons and pupils' learning slowed.

Leaders have been very successful in raising the profile of reading since September. The new library is proving to be very popular with pupils, who say it is 'amazing'. Leaders have timetabled regular opportunities for each class to visit the library and teachers are reporting that this is helping to reinvigorate pupils' love of reading. However, pupils' progress in reading remains slower than it needs to be, mirroring Year 6 outcomes in 2015. Following a term of structured monitoring by your phase and subject leaders, it has been identified that the main reason for the lack of progress is gaps in pupils' comprehension skills. Plans are in place for changing the way that reading is taught, for example by teachers using the chosen class novels, which are read daily to pupils, to develop comprehension skills. This is something pupils told me they would welcome. Leaders also recognise that the current assessment information for reading is not helping them to focus on what needs to be improved. The discussion I had with those leaders has ensured that the focus is tighter for the second half of the spring term. The link that you are intending to make with writing is clear, as is the emphasis that you are already putting on talk for writing. This is beginning to show in some very good examples of pupils' writing on the working walls. Regular pieces of independent writing are displayed which clearly show the progress of individual pupils from the beginning to the end of the autumn term. This is helpful for pupils and teachers and demonstrates that the use of pupils' targets and the feedback that teachers give is having a positive effect on pupils' progress.

You have responded to governors' requests to ensure that the assessment information they receive is useful. Reports now highlight pupils' progress and attainment for each year group and class. Although this work is still developing, there is clear evidence that governors understand what the information is telling them and that they challenge leaders about the academy's work to improve pupils' outcomes. Senior leaders continue to refine the academy's assessment system. It is now used more rigorously and regularly than previously to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding and to check on pupils' progress and attainment. This means that there is better identification of individual children who are at risk of falling behind. You have ensured that training and moderation with other local schools has better prepared teachers for making accurate judgements. Although teachers' assessments are still cautious, the confidence that teachers have in making accurate judgements of pupils' progress is growing. The English and mathematics leaders, who are relatively new to their roles, have an increasingly clear view of the areas for which they are responsible. This is because they are more involved in the monitoring of pupils' progress. They have written and shared their action plans, and, as a consequence, the momentum to drive forward whole-school improvement has been strengthened. Although these plans are detailed, they are modelled on the academy's development plan. They are, therefore, not focused tightly enough on regular monitoring of the quality of teaching in reading, writing and mathematics or on the impact on pupils' outcomes, which is where the foci must remain.

The academy's safeguarding procedures continue to meet requirements. You have worked hard with parents to ensure that pupils attend the academy regularly and that parents understand the impact of poor attendance on pupils' progress. Rigorous processes are in place to track pupils. Although there has been some improvement in the attendance of vulnerable pupils, particularly those pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs, their attendance remains below the national average. Governors recognise the significance of this and will continue to support leaders to further raise the profile of the importance of regular, punctual attendance.

External support

You have accepted considerable support from within your partnership, the Academy Trust and the Cambridge and Suffolk Schools Alliance, as well as the local authority, independent improvement partner and Diocese. This has ensured that you continue to evaluate standards, monitor progress and hone your own practice.

The Trust has invested in a structured improvement programme to support and challenge academy leaders and teachers. As a result, middle and senior leaders have received training on, for example, assessment. Leaders and governors have maintained a positive and productive relationship with the local authority officers who have also continued to support the academy by evaluating the impact of the improvement programme.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections, and it is likely that I will provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector