

Ofsted
6th Floor
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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Vickie Walker
Headteacher
St Martin's Primary School
Holly Bush Walk
Hereford
HR2 6AF

Dear Mrs Walker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Martin's Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 January 2016, 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 February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

The single central record, which is a summary of the checks required by law on the suitability of staff, is incomplete. There is a significant lack of transparency, communication and trust between senior leaders. Governors have been slow to act upon known issues and lack the skills required to steer the school forward.

The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure the single central record meets the statutory Department for Education guidance
- improve the effectiveness of senior leaders by resolving internal issues
- hold all leaders to account for their roles, including rapidly improving pupils' outcomes
- seek support for governance from the local authority to carry out statutory roles and responsibilities.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and members of the governing body. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I undertook a learning walk with you, examined samples of pupils' workbooks and spoke to pupils. The school's safeguarding records, improvement plans, pupil progress information, attendance data and notes of visits made by the local authority were scrutinised.

Context

Since the last inspection, three new teachers have been appointed. As a new chair was not forthcoming, the existing Chair of Governors remained in position. There is also a new vice-chair of the Governing Body.

Main findings

The single central record is incomplete. This is a summary of the checks required by law on the suitability of staff. The school have completed the checks, but not included all of the required details on the single central record. For example, mandatory checks, such as when the staff member's identity was verified, are not included. This should be completed as a matter of urgency.

Communication between the headteacher, other senior leaders and staff has been poor. Therefore, the impact of leaders' work to improve the school and pupil outcomes is very limited. Senior leaders have recently been made more accountable for pupils' progress. They feel that some improvements have been made with some aspects of their leadership roles, such as joint pupil progress meetings with teachers. However, strained relationships and significant communication issues are preventing senior leaders from operating effectively. For example, senior leaders had not been made aware of the severity of the local authority's concerns about the school until the day before this inspection took place. Leaders and managers need to rapidly resolve these ongoing problems to enable all leaders to fulfil their roles effectively.

While some early improvements were seen during the inspection in samples of teaching and pupils' workbooks, pupils' progress information suggests that these improvements are not yet consistent across the school. Leaders have introduced a new guided reading system and developed a link with another primary school, although it is too early to measure the impact of these changes.

Governors were aware of some staffing issues in the autumn, but have acted too slowly to tackle the problem. Governors have not sought enough information for themselves, but accept what they are given by the headteacher. Minutes of governors' meetings are not circulated soon enough before the next meeting and

demonstrate very little or no challenge regarding pupils' progress and the quality of teaching, for example. While governors now appear to appreciate some of the leadership issues, they need to seek urgent support from the local authority to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities by effectively holding the school to account.

The assessment information published in 2015 shows a generally declining trend across the school. Pupils' achievement at the end of Year 2 has improved slightly for the past two years. However, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected level at the end of Year 2 is still below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Assessment information shows that most children start Reception with skills that are below those typical for their age. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception increased slightly in 2015, but is still well below the national average for boys and pupils that are not disadvantaged. Phonics standards in Year 1 stayed the same, remaining well below the national average. The proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the expected level at the end of Year 6 increased in writing, stayed the same in mathematics and fell in reading. Most standards declined for Year 6 disadvantaged pupils and the most able. Current assessment information suggests that pupils across the school made slightly better progress in the second half of the autumn term. However, considerable improvement is needed to reverse the declining trend in some subjects and to enable pupils to make the progress that they are capable of.

Pupils' current attendance has improved marginally since the last inspection, but is still below the national average and not improving quickly enough. The school website has not been updated since September due to issues with the company who manage it. Leaders and managers have still not resolved this to date.

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

Herefordshire local authority has held several meetings with you and the governing body, as a result of its serious concerns about the school's leadership and lack of progress. In addition, visits from a national leader of education, representing the local authority, have taken place with notes of visits completed. The involvement of the local authority since the last inspection has been clear and measured. Some local authority recommendations have not been followed by the school. For example, there has been no demonstrable improvement in leadership, including governance. School senior leaders and governors have been slow to appreciate the declining position of the school and bring about effective improvements.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Herefordshire.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Bellworthy
Her Majesty's Inspector