

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Marilyn Redfern
Southfield Primary School
Pastures Way
Luton
Bedfordshire
LU4 0PE

Dear Mrs Redfern

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Southfield Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 February 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 first monitoring inspection since the school 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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that a rigorous and robust assessment system is put in place, as a matter of urgency, that allows the school to measure accurately the progress that pupils make
- improve the school action plan so that:
 - all the areas for development from the section 5 inspection are addressed explicitly
 - success criteria with measurable outcomes are included
 - information is added to show how progress towards achieving the plan's aims will be monitored
- carry out the recommended review of governance as soon as possible.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, two governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and I looked at a number of school documents. You took me on a tour of the school and we observed teaching and learning in four classes.

Context

Since the last inspection two teachers have started periods of planned leave and one teacher has returned to school following planned leave. Two new teachers joined the school in September, one of them a supply teacher. The assistant headteacher has moved to lower Key Stage 2 and now has responsibility for this phase. The vice-chair of the governing body has recently resigned and there are two other vacancies on the governing body. Year 5 is now taught in three classes rather than two in order to make teaching groups smaller. With the exception of Year 6, pupils in Key Stage 2 are no longer taught mathematics in ability sets.

Main findings

You and the school's governors were surprised and disappointed that the school was judged to require improvement when it was inspected in July 2015. However, you and the school's leaders and governors have not dwelt on this disappointment but have accepted the judgement fully and moved on.

You and the school's senior leaders have written an action plan to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The action plan includes a range of suitable actions, identifies key personnel responsible for actions and provides deadlines and milestones. However, although the areas for development are alluded to in the plan, references are not explicit enough. It is not absolutely clear how and when each point will be addressed. Similarly, although the impact column gives some indication of what successful completion of an action might look like, this is not explicit enough. Clear and measurable success criteria are needed to enable governors to hold the school's leaders fully to account. Further detail is needed to show how the plan will be monitored and by whom.

A range of actions have been carried out and these are beginning to have an impact on improving the areas identified at the last inspection. For example, the early years leader has worked alongside a local authority adviser to moderate the school's assessments and now feels confident to carry out such moderation independently. The early years leader and the local authority adviser have also audited provision both indoors and outdoors and made improvements to it. As a result, the early years leader feels that more challenge is now available to the children. This was

illustrated clearly during this monitoring inspection by a group of children who were using the outdoor area. They had been provided with lengths of drainpipe, various props, a bucket and some balls. The children worked together for an extended period of time to solve the problem of how to roll a ball from the top of their structure into the bucket. The activity was well planned, capturing and sustaining their interest, prompting them to think more deeply and encouraging them to work collaboratively.

The school has joined a project, with other schools in the local area, to improve the teaching of writing and writing outcomes for pupils. Evidence of the impact of this was clear to see during our tour of the school. The work that I saw in pupils' books was of a good quality and showed a great deal of care. Pupils were interested in and motivated by the work they had been given to do, such as writing an alternative version of Jack and the Beanstalk in Year 4.

A new assessment system has been introduced since the last inspection. The deputy headteacher has led discussion on how best to balance formative assessment (the day-to-day assessment made during lessons) with summative assessment (such as tests at the end of units of work). You told me that this work has been useful in making staff more confident with making their own assessments and less reliant on using tests. However, this system does not allow you to monitor the progress pupils make and this is a serious flaw. It is crucial that you know how well or otherwise pupils are progressing in order to intervene appropriately and at the right point. It is vital that a rigorous and robust system of assessment, that allows you to track progress closely, is implemented as a matter of urgency.

Governors have been provided with training on how to use the inspection dashboard and this has given them a better understanding of assessment information and how to use it. Governors are very committed to their roles but are fully aware that they need to increase their expertise in terms of developing understanding from an educational perspective. Although some avenues have been explored, a review of governance has not yet been booked or completed. It is crucial that this takes place as a matter of urgency. Governors are also considering approaching a national leader of governance, or the governing body of an outstanding school locally, to model outstanding governance for them.

External support

The local authority is supporting the school well. The school improvement adviser visits the school monthly and provides appropriate support and challenge. She has provided training for governors and this is something that they have valued greatly. The support provided by the early years adviser has been particularly valuable. Her visits are already having a clear impact on leadership and provision in early years.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools

Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Luton Borough Council.
This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector