

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



12 October 2015

Jennifer Wightman
Headteacher
Sundon Park Junior School
Kinross Crescent
Luton
LU3 4JU

Dear Mrs Wightman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sundon Park Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 22 and 23 September 2015, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The school is taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2015.

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by:
 - improving teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics and their knowledge and understanding of pupils' progress in mathematics, reading and writing
 - making sure that all pupils are given clear and accurate guidance to help them improve and to correct errors and misconceptions
 - making sure that teachers establish clear unequivocal expectations for spelling, handwriting and presentation across all areas of the curriculum
 - ensuring that any gaps in knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) and spelling which exist when pupils start at the school are quickly filled in order to improve their reading and writing skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring that the most-able pupils are given work which helps them achieve what they are capable of
 - ensuring that the work given to the least-able pupils is set at the right level to enable them to experience success with their own learning, feel confident to work without the support of an adult and make rapid progress
 - reviewing the provision for disadvantaged pupils and making sure their particular learning needs are met so that the gap between their attainment and the attainment of others closes.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the roles of senior and middle leaders so that they monitor effectively the impact of their actions on the quality of teaching and on pupils' progress
 - developing the knowledge and skills of the governors so that they understand the school's achievement data fully and are able to hold the school to account effectively for the impact of the pupil premium funding
 - ensuring that governors are able to help the school to develop effective communication with parents
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are always deployed effectively to have the most impact on pupils' progress.

- Improve pupils' behaviour by making sure that they consistently take care with their work, do their best and maintain their concentration when working.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 September 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, parents, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and four governors, a representative from the local authority and two headteachers working with the school.

Context

There have been some staffing changes since the first monitoring inspection, which took place on 14 May 2015. The senior leadership team is now complete with one acting deputy headteacher and two acting assistant headteachers. Two teachers left at the end of the summer term, including the subject leader for mathematics. The school has had difficulty recruiting to fill these vacancies. The assistant headteachers are leading developments in mathematics and a supply teacher is currently covering one of the three Year 3 classes. Pupils in Year 5 are taught in three small classes for English and mathematics. They are taught in two larger groups of about 35 pupils in other subjects. The deputy headteacher teaches in Year 5 to strengthen the current staff team.

Outcomes for pupils

This academic year is starting well. The Year 3 pupils have settled quickly in their new school and are making steady progress. The headteacher of the local infant school and the headteacher of Sundon Park Junior School are jointly monitoring achievement in Year 3 to check that pupils are quickly building on what they learnt in Year 2.

Pupils in other years told the inspector that they are doing more difficult work. The parents who met the inspector also said that teachers are very aware of the pupils' strengths and weaknesses in English and mathematics. Scrutiny of books confirms that teachers check the accuracy of the work carefully in these core subjects and give pupils more precise guidance to accelerate the rate of progress. The Year 6 groupings for the teaching of mathematics enable teachers to match the level of the work more closely to pupils' abilities. Year 6 pupils said that they liked mathematics because they could understand it better.

Most pupils enjoy their reading and writing when directed by an adult. Opportunities to read and write are provided in school, for example early each morning, during planned guided-reading sessions or through lessons. Teachers expect pupils to read and write independently but this aspect of home learning is not reinforced sufficiently at home and this is a barrier to raising standards further.

In all years, pupils are trying hard to do their best and improve the standard of their work in English and mathematics, but work in other subjects of the curriculum is inconsistent in quantity and quality. Improving numeracy, handwriting, spelling and grammar is a key priority, but pupils do not practise these skills sufficiently in other subjects such as science, art and geography. Some pupils spell words that are phonetically plausible but incorrect. Pupils do not yet understand subject-specific vocabulary and this leaves pupils at risk of not being able to understand test questions in formal assessments.

The 2015 results in the national tests confirm the findings of the January 2015 inspection report. Despite improvement in some areas, standards are still too low, particularly in mathematics, grammar, spelling and reading. Strategies to remedy gaps in knowledge and to address weaknesses in teaching during the spring and summer term 2015 had not been in place long enough to influence the 2015 results. In contrast, results for disadvantaged pupils improved and the gaps between them and others are closing.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers are working hard to review the quality of their teaching, address the issues raised at the section 5 inspection and improve pupils' attitudes to learning. In some aspects they are successful.

The strengths in teaching and learning include:

- clear explanations at the beginning of lessons to ensure that pupils know what they have to do
- good relationships with pupils, who are confident to ask for help
- effective use of questions to check that pupils understand what they have been taught
- positive management of behaviour to ensure that all pupils concentrate on what they are doing
- better collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants to support pupils with special educational needs.

These examples illustrate the willingness of teachers to improve their teaching. All staff are improving their subject knowledge in mathematics. However, such good practice is not the consistent norm in all classes, so not all classes are accelerating their rate of progress.

Less effective aspects of current teaching and learning are:

- too many different activities with insufficient time for pupils to practise and consolidate new concepts

- pitch of the work too low for the more-able pupils, who underachieve
- rigid adherence to lesson plans, which limits opportunities for teachers and pupils to share ideas and make the learning more exciting for pupils.

Because of the school's difficulties in recruiting staff in Year 5, the inspector checked the quality of learning when the Year 5 cohort is split into two groups of about 35 pupils each. Senior leaders have given this provision careful consideration. During this visit, pupils were well organised and settled quickly in the larger class for their guided-reading session. There was no evidence to suggest that their progress was slowed, and staff managed the learning effectively. There are often several adults in each of the two larger classes. Leaders are checking progress in Year 5 and arrangements for this year group will be a specific focus for inspectors at their next monitoring inspection. The pupils are still taught in three small classes in English and mathematics.

Across subjects, teaching assistants are contributing effectively to the progress of pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language.

Assessment and frequent marking are used to track the progress pupils are making. Teachers use this information to match the content of lessons to most pupils' abilities but not closely enough to the abilities of more-able pupils.

Teachers usually insist on the basics of good presentation in English and mathematics, including underlining titles and setting out work appropriately. They too often miss important features, however, in other subjects, such as when pupils incorrectly reverse the writing of digits when working with numbers or when they make simple spelling errors of common words.

Teachers' assessments are still not accurate, as shown by the mismatch between the 2015 national tests results and the school's predictions. Staff are liaising with other schools to develop a reliable assessment system. They are also teaching pupils about the specific vocabulary used in the tests' questions, and training pupils to read questions more carefully and to work within tight timescales.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The behaviour of pupils in and around the school is good. The pupils are friendly and courteous and they enjoy school. The playground arrangements work well and pupils are kind to one another. For example, the inspector observed pupils helping those who have special educational needs so that they were fully included in games. The school is calm and orderly. Although Year 3 pupils have only been in school for a few weeks, they know the school routines. Pupils also enjoy dining together and they calmly wait their turn for their lunch. Pupils understand the reward system to promote good behaviour and staff apply it consistently across the school. About half of the parents who completed the Ofsted questionnaire thought that pupils were not

well behaved at school but no instances of inappropriate behaviour were observed during this inspection.

Pupils conduct themselves well in class. However, pupils rely on an adult to keep them on task and find it difficult to work independently. Few older pupils are keen to read independently and for pleasure. Year 6 pupils, particularly boys, said that they did not like to write to explain their ideas. In these aspects, pupils' personal development and attitudes to learning are not yet strong enough to raise standards.

Pupils continue to feel safe in school as reported in the January 2015 inspection. Leaders monitor any incidents well to ensure that the school is safe and welcoming. All staff new to the school have had the necessary safe-recruitment checks.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher continues to demonstrate a clear vision and direction for the improvement of the school. Governors and senior leaders know what needs to be done and keep a tight focus on the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection. The leadership team is very new and its impact is unproven. However, leaders are clear about their areas of responsibilities. Staff welcome their advice and support. Governors and the headteacher are pursuing their action plan with determination. They have managed unexpected staffing issues appropriately and kept parents well informed.

The School Improvement Group (SIG), chaired by the local authority, is increasingly effective in reviewing progress and challenging senior leaders to ensure that the school no longer requires special measures within the planned timescale. Governors are well prepared for each SIG meeting. The review of governance has now taken place and governors are using its findings to improve their effectiveness further. The review of the use of the pupil premium funding is taking place in early October. The pupils' progress meetings, led by senior leaders each half-term, are effective in holding teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes. These meetings have been instrumental in improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

The parents' and carers' view of the school is still mixed. The school conducted its own 'Family-First' survey in July 2015. Many families took part in this survey and outcomes were positive. During this inspection, the parents and carers who completed the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, were more negative than the parents who spoke to the inspector. The inspector agrees with parents who believe that the quality of teaching and pupils' progress are not good enough overall, but that there is some effective practice in the school. Parents and carers have a key role to play, for example by checking whether children read frequently and practise their spelling. Senior leaders are trying hard to engage with all families. Staff are approachable, making themselves available daily at the school gate. In

contrast to some negative comments, several parents said that they had chosen this school specifically for the care and support it provided to their child.

External support

The local authority knows the school well and has provided direct support from its advisory service; this is welcomed and appreciated by the headteacher and staff. The senior improvement adviser is readily available for advice on a range of matters. His visits to the school have a clear focus on improving the effectiveness of the leadership team. The full impact of all external support on improving the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes is still fragile. This is because many leaders are new to their areas of responsibility and staff changes are slowing improvement.

The school's work with the local feeder infant school is benefiting pupils in Year 3. The partnership with the headteacher of an outstanding school, also a national leader of education, is continuing. Highly effective practitioners are available in that school to work with staff at Sundon Park Junior School and there is now scope to exploit this fully.