

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



18 April 2016

Wendy Baxter
Principal
Ark Chamberlain Primary Academy
Oldknow Road
Small Heath
Birmingham
West Midlands
B10 0HU

Dear Mrs Baxter

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ark Chamberlain Primary Academy

Following my visit with Michael Onyon, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 March 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 that 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 that took place in June 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

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

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the chair of the local governing board, the regional director of Birmingham primaries at Ark Schools, and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise the attainment and progress of pupils, especially in writing, by ensuring that:
 - work is matched to pupils' different abilities and takes into account their starting points
 - pupils are given more opportunities to write at length across a range of subjects
 - the most-able pupils are provided with appropriate challenge and the less able are given the support they need
 - pupils with special educational needs or disability are given the guidance they need to make good progress
 - the feedback teachers give to pupils consistently guides them on what they need to do to improve their work
 - the school is less dependent on temporary supply teachers.

- Improve safeguarding procedures by:
 - providing training for all staff in safeguarding, child protection and the potential risks of radicalisation and extremism
 - ensuring that all staff are appropriately trained in issues of health and safety
 - ensuring that all staff and leaders are fully aware of child protection procedures
 - improving the links between the school's designated lead for safeguarding and the governing body.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - providing training and support for leaders to develop and fulfil their roles
 - clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the governing body and ensuring it holds leaders to account for their actions
 - effectively monitoring the impact of the pupil premium to ensure it provides value for money
 - ensuring that the school has a stable and sustainable leadership team which is not reliant on external support
 - ensuring that the school has a realistic view of its strengths and weaknesses and devises plans to address its priorities for improvement.

An external review of governance, including the use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 March 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed lessons, some of them jointly with senior leaders, and scrutinised documents, including the school's improvement plan and leaders' own evaluations of the impact of their work and progress. Inspectors checked pupils' work in books during lesson observations, particularly their writing and mathematics work. Meetings were held with the regional director of Birmingham primaries at Ark Schools, the chair of the local governing body, the principal and senior leadership team, heads of year and the teacher responsible for managing special educational needs. The focus for inspectors during this second monitoring inspection was to identify how well pupils are learning and the extent to which leaders are improving teaching across the school. The single central record was checked to ensure that new staff have been added and that the school complies with statutory requirements in relation to vetting and disclosure.

Context

There have been significant staff changes since the previous monitoring inspection in December 2015. Five teachers have left and two more left at the end of March 2016. Three teachers joined the school in January 2016 and three more will be joining by the start of the summer term. Two teachers have returned from family leave. The heads of year have been reorganised and will include a new head of year appointment who joins the school at the start of the summer term. The school has also appointed three supply teachers to replace those who left at the end of December 2015.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal and senior leadership team continue to undertake regular and robust reviews of teachers' performance. This has resulted in a high turnover of staffing, which has been necessary to eradicate weak and inadequate teaching. The support and challenge offered by the sponsor, Ark Schools, as well as the increased scrutiny of the local governing body and senior leaders, have rightly focused the school's efforts on improving teaching and learning in all classes. There is still some way to go to eliminate all inadequate teaching and underachievement, but there are clear signs that the school is moving forward and building further capacity for more sustained improvement. Staff morale is high and most of the pupils spoken to reported that they are doing better now than previously.

Through their analyses of pupil performance information and the broad range of monitoring they undertake, including close scrutiny of pupils' work and progress, leaders have identified that weaknesses remain in the way pupils are taught and supported. As reported last time, the strongest teaching is in Year 6 and the weakest is in Year 3, but there is an uneven pattern across year groups. The work

of teaching assistants is currently being reviewed because here too, there are inconsistencies of practice and uneven impact across and within year groups. Senior leaders are monitoring and supporting heads of year as the school has the potential to develop middle leadership further. There is now greater clarity about the roles and responsibilities of heads of year. In addition, the vice-principal, who is responsible for managing pupil performance information, has done a great deal since the previous monitoring inspection to establish assessment systems that provide clear and accurate information about the attainment and progress of individuals and groups across the school.

The combination of clear roles and responsibilities for heads of year and unambiguous assessment information have sharpened the way in which pupils' progress and performance are monitored. This has already led to greater consistency in teachers' planning and improvements in pupils' writing and presentation in work books. Nonetheless, there remain some inconsistencies of practice, and leaders recognise, rightly, that too many pupils have a lot of ground to catch up as achievement gaps still exist between significant groups, such as the gaps that exist between disadvantaged pupils and others across the school and when compared with their peers nationally. The progress of pupils who have additional learning needs or special educational needs is being monitored very well by the lead teacher for this aspect of the school's provision. This is leading to some well-planned and appropriate interventions and support for these pupils, although the delivery of these interventions varies according to the quality of teaching and the availability of appropriately skilled supply staff.

There is evidence that the reorganisation and redeployment of heads of year are increasingly utilising the skills of stronger teachers so that they are better placed to influence, improve and support other staff in their respective year groups. Nonetheless, teachers and support staff are not seeing or sharing enough good practice. This is mainly due to the fact that senior leaders are very much involved in dealing with difficult staffing and recruitment issues, which is reflected in the high turnover of staffing that currently exists.

As reported last time, safeguarding procedures remain effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The school's monitoring records, assessment information, pupils' work books and the outcome of lesson visits during this monitoring inspection show that an increasing number of teachers are improving their practice. The most effective teaching provides tasks that are well matched to pupils' needs and abilities. The weakest teaching offers little challenge and does not extend or improve pupils' learning. There are some improvements in the quality of teaching; however,

assessments and pupils' work show that there is still too much teaching that requires improvement and is not yet good enough.

Assistant principals, heads of year and lead teachers who manage subjects or aspects such as special educational needs provision are strong practitioners and lead by example. In addition, new appointments and smarter, more accessible and accurate assessment information have further strengthened teaching. Grouping pupils by ability in Year 6 has given leaders and teachers the opportunity to focus lesson objectives on key learning areas that build on what was covered before. Improved planning across classes provides greater consistency in the way lessons are structured, and this is being followed up with additional monitoring, support and challenge from assistant principals. Nonetheless, some teachers are not challenging the most-able pupils enough in lessons, and the support provided by teaching assistants, supply teachers and support staff is not consistent enough to improve learning evenly across classes and year groups.

Teachers' marking has improved, with some good examples where teachers provide specific work, known as 'closing the gap tasks', that offer pupils more opportunities to correct their work. Pupils' books show that the most effective teachers intervene more during lessons to support and correct pupils' work. However, weaker teaching and inconsistent support from teaching assistants cause pupils to lose interest and not make enough progress. Pupils do not misbehave during lessons, even when provided with mundane or unchallenging work, meaning adults do not notice when pupils are disengaged or mark time.

Staff and leaders are now in a stronger position to extract information about the progress of particular groups of pupils and individuals because assessments are more established and accessible than at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. This is helping the most effective teachers and leaders to adapt their lessons to meet the particular learning needs of those who may be falling behind. This was evident in Year 6 when an assistant principal planned a lesson that built very well on what pupils had already covered. Questions were posed and tasks adapted to help pupils think about how they were going to answer questions fully. This improved both their spoken English as well as the structure of their writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

There is very little inappropriate behaviour in lessons and around the school as pupils move from class to class or change groups. Teachers and adults apply the school's behaviour code consistently well. Pupils told an inspector that they are expected to learn more now and work harder, although in some lessons observed, pupils were not always expected to persevere or try more challenging tasks.

Pupils learn about fairness, democracy and moral values through assemblies and special projects celebrating the work of famous individuals in history such as Joseph Chamberlain. Pupils have studied the biographies of writers and actors such as Meera Syal, a celebrity from the West Midlands, to appreciate the way she has influenced the local and wider community. A local entrepreneur recently visited the school which inspired pupils to 'aim high' and always do their best. A special project entitled 'Who Rules Britain?', for older pupils to learn about representative democracy, voting and balloting, prepares pupils very well for life beyond the school in a modern democratic and multicultural Britain.

The school makes good use of the primary schools sports fund through the use of specialist sports coaches who lead and support physical education lessons. Physical activity, sport and healthy living are promoted well. A good initiative since the previous inspection is the introduction of the school choir, led by a newly appointed teacher, who is also a music specialist. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their rehearsals and are improving their singing and musical skills very well. This provides additional opportunities for pupils during breaktimes to enjoy singing together.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in high attendance rates. Persistent absence rates are very low, and pupils are punctual and ready for school.

Pupils told inspectors that they trust their teachers, learning mentors and adults and feel very safe and secure in school. They report that the school is, as one put it, 'better now because the rules are clear,' and another pupil added, 'We also get more praise through the "positive notes".' These 'positive notes' are rewards for good work and behaviour and culminate in special award assemblies each week with some pupils selected to have tea and cakes with the principal (the 'principal's tea').

Outcomes for pupils

As reported last time, pupils do better in reading and mathematics than writing. Nonetheless, pupils' progress is uneven across the school, reflecting the inconsistencies in teaching and high turnover of staff as leaders endeavour to eliminate weak or inadequate teaching. The form and structure of pupils' handwriting have improved since the last monitoring inspection because teachers introduced special writing books with printed tram lines that help pupils write more evenly and consistently. Pupils read often and widely and the school makes very good use of its well-resourced library to encourage pupils to read a range of genres and authors.

There remain inconsistent expectations for the amount of work pupils complete in books, so that pupils are not always doing enough work in lessons. However, pupils are now being given more time to explain fully their ideas and answers to questions

in English lessons, so that speaking and listening skills are improving. In mathematics lessons, more problem-solving tasks are being provided for pupils to complete, which is helping them to show different methods of calculation. The most-able pupils are now doing better in Year 6 where the teaching is more challenging, but this varies too much in Years 3 to 5 across classes, meaning that the most-able pupils more generally are not being extended or challenged sufficiently.

There are still too few pupils reaching or exceeding age-related levels in Years 3 and 4, meaning that standards remain too low in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 4. Pupils make faster progress in Years 5 and 6 but have a lot of ground to catch up, as reported at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. Significant achievement gaps still exist between different groups. Pupils with special educational needs or disability are now doing slightly better than previously because leaders have put in place more appropriate support and interventions. Pupils in the early stages of learning to speak English are now being encouraged to speak in complete sentences during group work or class discussions. This is more consistent now than at the time of the previous inspection, although again, these pupils have a lot of ground to catch up and are not making even rates of progress across year groups.

External support

The sponsor, Ark Schools, has provided a good balance of support and challenge. External consultants and advisers and the use of Ark network subject advisers provide objective evaluations of the work of the school as well as focused support, training and professional development for staff. Increasing partnership work with the partner Ark Primary Academy provides staff with good opportunities to see and share good practice.