

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



22 January 2016

Ms Jane Cartlidge
Headteacher
Southfield Primary Academy
Banbury Road
Brackley
NN13 6AU

Dear Ms Cartlidge

Special measures monitoring inspection of Southfield Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 12–13 January 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 which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2014. 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:

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

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

This letter and the 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 Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2014

- Improve teaching to good by:
 - ensuring that tasks match the learning needs of pupils more accurately, including those of the most-able, disabled pupils, and those who have special educational needs
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' work and their progress
 - increasing the provision for computing to benefit pupils' learning
 - making better use of questions to probe pupils' understanding and to extend their learning.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the roles of senior and middle leaders so that they are more effective in identifying and targeting areas for improvement in teaching and learning, and acting upon these
 - developing the knowledge and skills of governors, so that they sufficiently hold the academy to account
 - improving the leadership and provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
- Improve pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that the most capable pupils reach higher standards in reading and writing
 - accelerating the progress of pupils who are disabled and who have special educational needs
 - meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils more effectively so that the gap between their achievement and others closes in the academy.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 12–13 January 2016

Evidence

During this monitoring inspection, I observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, groups of teachers and middle leaders, and groups of pupils. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body, two other governors and the external consultant who is supporting the academy. I considered the 48 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke with parents as they dropped their children off at the academy and with some parents who approached me at the end of the academy day. I considered three letters I received from parents. I observed pupils' learning in visits to 11 lessons, scrutinised their work in lessons and reviewed separately pupils' work in English.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, six teaching assistants have left the academy, four through redundancies. The academy is currently recruiting to fill two vacant teaching assistant posts. During this monitoring visit, I did not consider children's attainment and progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Outcomes for pupils

Published performance information has confirmed the provisional findings reported in the previous monitoring inspection. Improvements were seen in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 1, with the result that attainment rose to be above the national average for other primary schools, having previously been below. Achievement in phonics was extremely strong with 97% of pupils achieving the expected standard; this was above the national figure.

At Key Stage 2, published information shows improved attainment and progress in reading and mathematics but only minor improvements in writing. Seventy per cent of pupils attained Level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics, which was an improvement on the previous year. While attainment remains too low, the academy met the governments' floor standards in 2015, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. This was not the case at the time the academy was placed in special measures.

Gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged children and other pupils narrowed in Key Stage 1, particularly in reading. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils also rose by the end of Key Stage 2 but remained significantly lower than that of other pupils.

The academy's current tracking information and pupils' work seen in books show that rates of progress for current pupils are improving, although this is not consistent in all years. For example, academy leaders have identified that pupils are not doing as well as they should be in reading in the lower Key Stage 2 classes. Academy leaders have identified specific weaknesses in pupils' reading skills and implemented changes to the curriculum to strengthen their reading comprehension, and improvements are now beginning to be seen. Conversely, the academy's assessment information shows that pupils in Years 5 and 6 are making stronger progress in reading, mathematics and writing. This information also shows that in Years 5 and 6 the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others in the academy are narrowing, although the picture remains more mixed in other years.

While pupils' books from other classes show improvements in the progress pupils are making, academy leaders acknowledge that the academy's tracking information is not fully reliable for some of the other classes. This is because not all teachers have got to grips with the academy's revised assessment arrangements, particularly with regard to how to record assessment information accurately on the academy's electronic tracking system.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The academy's records show that the quality of teaching is improving. The pupils I spoke with, including a group of most-able pupils, said that their lessons were now more challenging than before, particularly in mathematics. Pupils in Year 6 described how their teachers encourage them to ask for harder work when they have grasped the concepts being taught.

Your judgements about the quality of teaching are now rooted in a wider range of evidence than before, including more consideration of the impact of teaching over time on pupils' achievement. Scrutinies of teaching now check how well lessons are planned to meet the needs of pupils with different starting points, although the records kept do not always make clear enough how much difference teaching is making to the progress of different groups of pupils.

Despite the improvements seen in my visits to lessons during the monitoring inspection, there remains unevenness in teaching quality and a small, though reducing, minority of teaching is not always strong enough to ensure that all pupils make the most of the teaching time available.

Teachers' planning to meet pupils' different needs is stronger in mathematics than English, particularly for most-able pupils. In the lessons seen, teachers made good use of assessment information to plan activities which stretched and challenged pupils of all abilities. For example, in a mixed-age Years 3 and 4 mathematics lesson observed, pupils made good gains in their learning because the teacher had planned a range of activities based on her accurate diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses in

pupils' conceptual understanding. As a result, pupils who were less confident in understanding how to identify equivalent fractions were given different work, to help remedy their misconceptions, from the pupils whose work showed they had grasped the concept securely. Higher-attaining pupils were set more challenging tasks, which helped deepen their understanding and raise their attainment further. In a Years 1 and 2 mathematics lesson I observed, pupils enjoyed taking on the 'challenging', 'more challenging' or 'super-challenging work', and careful monitoring by the teacher ensured that most were doing the appropriate task or could be steered to tackle work which better met their needs.

Effective teaching was also observed in English and the work in pupils' books indicates that they are making better progress than before in developing their writing skills. Some pupils continue to make mistakes, however, in their spelling of high-frequency words. Where teaching is most effective in English, activities are carried out at a challenging pace and the teachers have high expectations of what pupils should achieve in the time provided. For example, in a mixed-age Years 3 and 4 lesson which I observed, pupils made good gains in writing as they learned to write a formal letter of complaint using a range of devices, including fronted adverbials, conjunctions and embedded clauses. The teacher set clear time limits for each activity so that pupils knew they had to work quickly to get the work done. Pupils were excited by the task but worked quietly and purposefully, because the teacher had linked the activity to a book they were reading; pupils enjoyed choosing the things they would like to complain about. However, in the lesson I observed on the same topic in another class, pupils did not make the same good gains in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding. This was because they were given too long to do the activity and the teacher's expectations were not sufficiently high with regard to pupils' behaviour. As a result, some pupils chatted too much as the teacher worked with a small group of lower-attaining pupils.

In the English lessons seen in the mixed-age Years 5 and 6 classes, pupils made good gains in developing their writing skills. In these lessons, teachers used a range of activities to strengthen pupils' understanding of how to record dialogue, using a range of punctuation devices accurately and deploying imaginative vocabulary. Pupils acted out their dialogue before carefully recording their scripts neatly in their books. Where this teaching was most effective, the teachers gave precise instructions so that pupils knew exactly what was expected as they practised their dialogue in pairs; the pupils were given only a short amount of time, which meant they worked quickly and purposefully. In one of the lessons though, this activity went on for too long, which meant that learning time was lost and a few pupils lost concentration. Nevertheless, in a further observation of the same class, all the pupils worked hard and quietly, and wrote accurate and lengthy scripts. Standards of presentation in pupils' books were high in each of the Years 5 and 6 classes observed. Work in the books of younger pupils demonstrates how teaching is proving effective in improving their handwriting skills. However, teaching in English does not always stretch most-able pupils enough.

Teachers' marking is usually very effective in providing helpful feedback to pupils on what they have done well and setting precise targets for improvement. Pupils are given time to respond to their teachers' comments, make corrections and tackle additional tasks to remedy weaknesses or stretch them further.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

In the lessons I observed, pupils' behaviour was mostly good; their behaviour was impeccable when the teaching was most effective. A few pupils continue to lose concentration where teachers' expectations are not high enough.

The pupils I met with in meetings and around the academy were all very polite. At playtime and lunchtime, pupils were seen to get on well as they played a variety of games. Increased sports provision at lunchtimes has contributed to further improvements to pupils' behaviour at lunchtimes since the previous monitoring inspection.

Throughout the monitoring process, pupils have reported consistently that they feel safe. This helps explain why attendance is above the national average for primary schools. All the pupils I spoke with talked of how caring their teachers are and that they will have no hesitation in asking for help if ever they are worried.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, leaders have reviewed and improved the academy's child protection policy. This is a much more effective document than before because it now reflects the academy's arrangements more clearly and helpfully and includes the most recent government requirements, for example with regard to protecting children from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the previous monitoring inspection, you and other leaders have continued to make the improvements necessary to the quality of education provided by the academy. Improvements to teaching are raising achievement in Key Stage 2 so that the improved achievement seen in the 2015 Key Stage 1 national assessments is being seen more consistently in Key Stage 2. However, your self-evaluation of the effectiveness of the academy's work at this time is over-generous and has rightly been challenged by governors.

You have provided effective leadership in devising and introducing the new curriculum, in place since September 2015, and providing the necessary training to staff. You acknowledge though that the information provided on the academy's website is not yet detailed enough to enable parents to support their child's learning as effectively as they could.

The academy's financial position, which was precarious at the time of the section 5 inspection which placed the academy in special measures, is now on a much surer footing. The staff restructuring and stronger financial management now in place are enabling you to focus all of your attention, and that of other senior and middle leaders, on raising the quality of teaching. You know that while teachers' use of ongoing assessment to check on pupils' learning and to inform their teaching practice has improved, not all staff understand how to record accurately the progress pupils are making when inputting data to the academy's new electronic tracking system. It is imperative that this is tackled quickly so that you and other leaders, including governors, can be fully confident that pupils in all classes are making the progress they should.

Staff have responded well to restructured staffing arrangements, introduced from September, and the new faculty and phase leaders are working more effectively in carrying out their roles. However, middle leaders also reported that they have not been able to carry out all the checks they should because of the demands of implementing the major changes to the curriculum and the academy's revised assessment arrangements. Teachers said that while they have found the new class arrangements – particularly the introduction of more mixed-age classes – to be challenging, it has led to phase leaders, faculty leaders and teachers working more effectively together than before, to improve consistency in teaching across different classes.

Since the last monitoring inspection, you have secured important improvements to the management of provision for pupils with special educational needs. The deputy headteacher is now making regular checks to ensure that the specific interventions put in place to support pupils who need extra help are working. This was not the case at the time of the last monitoring inspection. Teaching staff who were critical of this aspect of leadership at the previous monitoring inspection reported that it has improved very considerably. They said that the deputy headteacher now responds quickly to any concerns they raise about individual pupils. The increased leadership time allocated has also strengthened the monitoring of support provided by external specialists so that staff know which strategies are working and which need to be reviewed and adapted. Academy leaders have joined an 'achievement for all programme' to help strengthen the academy's practice in further meeting the needs of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, as well as disadvantaged pupils. It is too early, however, to see what difference this programme is making.

The quality and effectiveness of the academy's governance arrangements have improved markedly. Governors are now making a key contribution to the academy's improvement. They have taken on board the findings of the external review of governance to devise a sharp and effective action plan which links closely to the academy's key priorities for improvement. The Chair of the Governing Body now meets with you fortnightly to check on the academy's progress, and other governors

now make regular checks on the academy's work to ensure that the information they are being given is accurate. All governors are now devoting more time to their roles: for example, while a committee structure is in place, governors have committed to attend all committee meetings so that they have shared oversight of the impact of actions being taken to improve the academy. They have also sought additional training to ensure that they are carrying out their roles as effectively as they can. As a result of these improvements, governors have a much more secure understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses than before. They are providing good levels of challenge to you and other leaders, particularly with regard to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Governors know that the academy's new website does not include all of the statutory information it should. When I challenged them about this, they were able, immediately, to point to evidence of the steps they were taking to ensure that this is quickly remedied.

The improved management of the academy's finances means that the funding provided through the primary sports premium is now being used properly to raise attainment and participation in physical education (PE). Training has been provided to improve teachers' confidence and skills in teaching PE, and checks have been made to ensure that they are delivering the new PE curriculum effectively. The older pupils I met with said that teaching in PE is much better than before and that they now find PE lessons to be challenging and fun. The academy achieved the Bronze Mark for PE at the end of the summer term and more pupils are participating in extra-curricular PE than before.

Despite the improvements being made, parents' views about the quality of education provided by the academy – and the effectiveness of the academy's leadership – remain mixed. Around one-sixth of parents have completed the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, in the last 365 days. The responses show a very mixed picture and indicate that not all parents have sufficient confidence in the academy.

In the informal discussions I held with parents at the start and end of the academy day, parents gave equally contrasting views. While some spoke very positively about the improvements being made, others were critical of the academy's leadership and management, the quality of teaching and the quality of communication. The three letters I received from parents were all highly supportive of the academy. I considered the parental concerns raised during the monitoring inspection, and the findings are reported in the appropriate sections in this letter. Nevertheless, it is important that you take steps to improve communication with parents, particularly with regard to the impact of the actions you and other staff are taking to tackle the areas identified for improvement at the section 5 inspection.

External support

Improvements to the academy's financial position have enabled leaders to secure more support from an external consultant. This has included good-quality training for governors, senior leaders and middle leaders together with joint lesson observations with the headteacher and other staff to check that the judgements made about the quality of teaching are accurate. The findings of these visits are reported to governors as another means for them to check on the academy's work.

To further increase the pace of improvement, I recommend that the academy:

- quickly ensures that all staff fully understand how to record pupils' progress and attainment accurately on the academy's electronic tracking system so that leaders, including governors, can make more accurate assessments of pupils' progress over time
- strengthen communication with parents, particularly regarding the actions taken – and their impact – to tackle the areas of improvement recommended by the section 5 inspection.