

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



28 June 2016

Mr Simon Adams
Croft Community School
Greencroft Road End
Annfield Plain
Stanley
DH9 8PR

Dear Mr Adams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Croft Community School

Following my visit to your school on 17 June 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 October 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:

- Clarify their current definition of good progress to ensure that it reflects high expectations of progress across a range of subjects and compares favourably with expectations in high-performing similar schools.
- Include measureable targets for pupils' progress in the action plan so that leaders and governors can quickly check if the activities in the plan are having the desired effect.
- Address the requirements for governors to publish information on the school's website.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, pupils and three

members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I reviewed school documents relating to records of staff recruitment, performance management and leaders' checks on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. I visited a number of lessons with the headteacher, during which I talked with pupils and reviewed the work in their books.

Context

Since the inspection in October 2015 there have been significant changes in the school. The number of pupils has risen from 101 to 126, a 25% increase. In response to this increase and other changes in staff, over 50% of the current staff (19) have joined the school since the inspection.

At the same time, the deputy headteacher has been absent from school. A senior teacher has stepped up to take on the role of the deputy headteacher but her substantive role in the team has not been covered since November 2015.

The long-standing chair of governors has resigned and four new governors have joined the governing body, including two parent governors and a headteacher from a local special school.

Main findings

Despite the challenges of the increase in the number of pupils on roll and new staff joining the school, leaders have made progress in addressing the areas identified as needing improvement at the previous inspection. Visits to a range of lessons and the work in pupils' books confirmed leaders' judgements about improvements in the effectiveness of teaching and the progress pupils make.

Work in pupils' books is marked following the school's feedback policy. Pupils described the system and how it helps them to improve their work. Pupils were clear, for example, that they value the time they get to respond to teachers' advice and guidance. Leaders have ensured that there is a tighter focus on writing. Work seen in pupils' books and displayed around school demonstrates that pupils are making progress in their writing. They are justifiably proud of their developing skills.

Middle leaders have had more opportunities to use their skills and knowledge to support other teachers. They have developed 'strand trackers' for English, mathematics and science and have supported staff to use the trackers to assess the progress pupils make within lessons and over short periods of time. This is helping teachers to plan lessons that are more closely matched to pupils' needs. Not all teachers are using this system consistently, so not all pupils are getting the benefit of more precise teaching.

The headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, together with middle leaders,

have introduced new systems to support raised expectations of pupils' progress. It is clear from work in lessons and pupils' books there are higher expectations of what pupils can achieve in different subjects. However, further work is required on defining what good or better progress means in this school. This is because expectations are currently based on what pupils have previously achieved. Leaders have not considered whether their expectations compare favourably with those seen in high-performing special schools. The work in pupils' books and leaders' monitoring information show that as a result of more effective teaching, pupils can progress at a faster rate than previously thought of as good. Leaders have recognised that they need to set more-challenging targets for pupils, both for their academic progress and personal development.

The tracking system developed since the previous inspection allows leaders and governors to quickly identify which pupils and groups of pupils are making faster or slower progress than others. This is an interim system as middle leaders, working with teachers from other schools and supported by the local authority, are developing a new system linked to the revised national curriculum. It is anticipated that the new system will enable leaders to track pupils' progress in relation to the standards expected for their ages.

The headteacher and governors have developed an action plan which is closely linked to the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 report. The detailed plan has led to noticeable improvements at a time when the school has expanded. Currently there are insufficient measurable targets for pupils' progress in the action plan. This restricts the way leaders and managers can check if the activities in the plan are having the desired effect.

Leaders have made significant changes to how they check the effectiveness of teaching. Checks now include a tight focus on the progress seen in pupils' books, and scrutiny of teachers' assessments as well as activities in lessons. The feedback given to teachers is precise and linked to improving pupils' progress. Similarly, teachers' performance management has been sharpened so there is a clear link between their targets, the school's action plan, pupils' progress and their professional development. There are now different expectations for teachers at different stages of their careers.

An external review of governance has taken place and an action plan is being developed. Governors have undertaken a useful skills audit and are working to fill gaps in their knowledge and expertise. Governors have significantly increased their direct engagement with the school and now check the information they are given about the progress pupils make and specific developments, for example in pupils' writing.

A review of the governors' use of pupil premium was also completed in the spring term. The review is incisive and gives sound recommendations for how the school can achieve better impact from the use of the additional resource.

Governors have not yet ensured that they publish all the information they should on the school's website. Several key documents were missing on the day of the visit.

External support

The local authority has placed a significant number of pupils in the school without consideration of the time needed to recruit and train staff. This led to an increase in the use of temporary staff earlier in the school year. Leaders have caught up, following a recruitment drive, and currently only six members of staff are employed on temporary contracts. All posts in the staff structure are filled by permanent members of staff or will be by September. The local authority has given a guarantee that pupil numbers will not increase significantly in the short term.

The local authority, apart from the concerns raised about the rapid increase in the number of pupils placed in the school, has provided a high level of effective support to leaders and governors. Their continued commissioning of support from the educational psychology service to provide advice and training, particularly for pupils on the autistic spectrum, is reassuring.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Hayter
Her Majesty's Inspector