

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Sue Lane
Gee Cross Holy Trinity CE Primary School
Higham Lane
Gee Cross
Hyde
Cheshire
SK14 5LX

Dear Mrs Lane

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gee Cross Holy Trinity CE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 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 November 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.

Evidence

During my visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the key stage 1 leader. I met with a group of five parents who shared their views about the school. I also met with a group of pupils in Year 6 and talked informally throughout the day with other pupils. I spoke on the telephone to the chair of the governing body and to the chair of the curriculum and standards committee. I met with the local authority's school improvement adviser to discuss the action taken since the last inspection and the level of support provided. I examined a variety of documentation, including the school's improvement plan, its self-evaluation

summary, additional assessment documentation, minutes of meetings and records of lesson observations. We also carried out a series of joint visits to classrooms to look at pupils' progress in English and mathematics. I also scrutinised a selection of books from pupils in Years 2, 3, 5 and 6.

Context

One teacher left the school in at the end of the spring term 2016 while another returned following a period of sickness. Another teacher will leave at the end of July.

Main findings

You and the leadership team are working hard to improve teaching and raise achievement in your school. However, much as you have made a brisk start to the journey, there is still a long distance to go. Your planning documents are thorough and clearly focused on the areas for improvement detailed in the school's previous inspection report. You have produced an honest and realistic evaluation of the school's current performance and have correctly identified the year groups in which the weakest teaching appears. You are taking action, in concert with various external advisers, to tackle the underperformance of some teachers. The action you are taking has initially consisted of support plans to secure improvement from the teachers concerned.

Records of your checks on teaching show that teachers are provided with feedback that contains strengths and points for development. In records of observations of weaker teaching, these points for development are closely linked to the areas for improvement from the previous inspection report. However, teaching quality remains inconsistent.

Classroom environments are bright and inviting. Work displayed is of a good standard, with neat presentation and evidence of higher levels of vocabulary, punctuation and spelling.

Over three quarters of children in the Reception Year are expected to reach a good level of development in 2016, compared with two thirds in 2015. Standards are also on the rise in phonics (the sounds that letters make) in Year 1 and at the end of Year 2. In phonics in Year 1, last year's low point of 43% of pupils reaching the nationally expected standard has improved strongly to 80% for the current year. This improvement has been a direct result of intervention and support by the key stage 1 leader.

Expectations in Year 2 have been raised considerably since the last inspection. Consequently, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are set to rise. Nearly all pupils also reached the expected level in phonics this year.

Teachers are still inconsistent in the level of demand they place on pupils when they set tasks for them. Where teachers have high expectations, the standard of work produced is at least good and often shows skills and knowledge beyond that expected for the age of the pupil. Pupils in Year 6, for example, said that they felt their teacher provided challenging work for them and had high expectations of them.

In the year groups where teaching is weaker, however, the work set does not enable pupils to build on or extend their knowledge. For example, giving a series of mathematics tasks that simply present the same task in three different ways does not challenge pupils at their appropriate level. It also does not allow them to apply what they have learned or develop their problem-solving or reasoning skills.

You have taken steps to improve handwriting and presentation since the previous inspection. There is now a preferred school style in place, and it is given a high profile. Teachers, for example, display high-quality examples of pupils' work in prominent places, such as on the front of the classroom door. There are also good examples of the new style in dedicated handwriting books. Pupils do not, however, regularly use the new style in their other written work.

You have introduced a new marking and feedback policy to the school but it is not yet being applied consistently. Where it is adhered to, pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve and have 'MAD' ('make a difference') time or 'fix it' time to respond. Where teachers are not yet following it consistently, pupils do not respond to teachers' comments and pupils sometimes make no connection between comments made and the next piece of work.

You have begun to improve the quality of leadership and management. The governing body is a strong partner in this process. It has an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and regularly holds senior leaders to account, as evidenced by minutes of meetings. In discussions, governors reported a strengthening of their links with school in recent months, as increased honesty in assessing the weaknesses and the strengths of the school has influenced their work and that of the school's leaders.

I note from conversations with pupils in Year 6 that you have grappled with the issues of illegal parking, and that they took a role in this by making banners. You report that further steps are planned to make the road outside school a safe area.

Parents who spoke to me were very positive about the school. They are of the view that there have been improvements this year, in communications, for example, and that pastoral care is strong. They also appreciate the extra opportunities that are provided for their children, such as educational visits and sporting activities.

External support

The local authority has provided extensive support to the school in order to raise standards. The positive impact of this has been seen mainly in key stage 1 and the early years.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector