

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



18 July 2016

Paul Brown
St Lawrence's RC Primary School
Headlam Street
Byker
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE6 2JX

Dear Mr Brown

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Lawrence's RC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 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 December 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:

- improve pupils' outcomes in writing
- sharpen leaders' approaches to checking improvements in the early years.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, an assistant headteacher, the early years leaders, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. We visited classrooms together, spoke with pupils and looked at pupils' work. A range of documents were scrutinised, including records relating to the monitoring of teaching and governing body minutes. I checked documentation and information linked to safeguarding.

Context

Since the inspection, one teacher has been appointed. There is now a teacher with responsibility for leading teaching and learning and one new governor is in place. A deputy headteacher has been appointed to start in September 2016.

Main findings

You have taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching. As a result, pupils' outcomes are improving. The appointment of a leader for teaching and learning and arrangements for sharing effective practice across the school are starting to have a positive impact. An increased focus on pupils' progress across the school is beginning to pay dividends. Results at the end of early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 have improved from previous years. Year 1 pupils' phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) screen results have also improved.

The proportions of pupils working at the expected levels in writing, while improving, are not high enough. You, your governors and the English leader are aware of this and are taking action to bring further improvements. Opportunities are increasing for pupils to write at length and to write about topics which interest them. However, sometimes the most able pupils have too detailed a framework of support and this limits their responses. Generally, the quality of handwriting is not well developed and you have plans in place to implement a more consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting.

Teachers are putting greater thought into matching the work to meet pupils' learning needs and to close gaps in their learning. Pupils are becoming more motivated by the range of experiences provided both within lessons and by visits outside of school. You recognise that there is still further work to ensure that existing learning gaps are closed and that pupils are provided with work which challenges and deepens their learning.

Improved support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is helping accelerate their progress. The systems for coordinating and monitoring the learning in smaller groups are improving. However, some support is not yet fully evaluated to check that it is providing the planned acceleration to pupils' learning.

Detailed recording of pupils' progress is helping teachers and leaders to check on pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress is now checked more carefully at regular meetings involving leaders and teachers. You have in place plans to introduce a pupil progress recording system which is better matched to the national curriculum from September 2016.

Early years provision is steadily improving. As a result, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has improved this year. The staff are starting to bring about effective changes following advice and support from a local authority

adviser. The indoor provision has an improved range of opportunities for children to develop their reading, writing and number skills. More focused adult-led learning is helping children to make better progress with basic skills. However, where children are choosing activities, sometimes the purpose of the task is unclear and adults do not intervene to engage children's learning. The outdoors learning area is not well developed and learning opportunities to improve reading, writing and number are limited.

Pupils' attendance levels have improved due to a more determined approach. Careful monitoring of pupils' absence and better involvement with the attendance officer and parent support worker is developing links with parents. Pupils understand the value of high levels of attendance due to a higher school profile and improved praise systems.

Leaders' approaches to checking improvements across the school are improving. You have benefited from support provided by the local authority achievement partner. Better organised systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning are helping to identify where teachers require support to improve their practice. However, written feedback to teachers is sometimes not specific enough to provide clear guidance on how to improve teaching further. Although overall checking of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is more systematic, monitoring for improvement in early years by middle and senior leaders is underdeveloped.

You have put in place a plan to address the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report. While the plan includes appropriate actions, it could be improved. This could be done by identifying more specific timeframes for some actions and being clearer about who is responsible and accountable for completion of actions and monitoring of impact.

Governors have responded positively to the inspection report. A detailed governors' action plan is in place, to be implemented from September 2016. Increasing levels of challenge, combined with appropriate support, are improving the levels of strategic accountability provided by governors to the headteacher and leaders.

External support

Well-coordinated support from Newcastle local authority and Newcastle and Hexham Diocese has been used to good effect. You have benefited from leadership support from the headteacher of a good school. Effective support and challenge from the local authority achievement partner is beginning to improve the quality of teaching and the skills of leaders. The local authority consultant support in early years has brought some improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. However, there has been limited impact on leaders' skills to check improvements in this area of the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector