

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



22 July 2016

Mrs Sam Kidd  
Executive Headteacher  
Northside Primary School  
Northside  
Workington  
Cumbria  
CA14 1BD

Dear Mrs Kidd

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Northside Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 28 and 29 June 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2015.

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.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in October 2015.**

- Improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring leaders provide clear direction for the school that motivates and inspires staff and pupils
  - ensuring self-evaluation includes in-depth analysis of pupils' achievement in each year group and that the impact of actions taken is evaluated fully
  - ensuring that improvement planning is effective and sets out timely and clear strategies to tackle weaknesses in teaching and raise pupils' achievement
  - ensuring that checks on teaching give sufficient attention to the progress of different groups of pupils, particularly the most-able and disadvantaged pupils
  - reviewing teachers' and teaching assistants' subject knowledge, especially in mathematics, and making sure they are provided with professional development to extend their knowledge and skills.
  
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
  - making sure the activities planned by teachers build on pupils' prior learning, maintain pupils' interest, and are appropriate for their age, ability and learning needs
  - assessing pupils' learning in lessons and adapting teaching if it is not extending their knowledge, skills or understanding
  - giving pupils opportunities to investigate, solve problems and write at length so they learn to persevere with challenging tasks and develop confidence in their own ability
  - improving questioning and discussion in lessons so pupils can contribute and explore ideas
  - ensuring pupils are taught about British values such as democracy and about different cultures and life in modern Britain outside their immediate experience.
  
- Raise pupils' achievement in all subjects, especially in writing and mathematics, by:
  - making sure the most-able pupils are provided with work that extends their knowledge and skills
  - checking the impact of pupil premium funding, and making sure disadvantaged pupils are supported effectively to raise their achievement
  - enabling pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to challenging problems
  - developing pupils' vocabulary and grammar, punctuation and spelling in all subjects.

- Improve the early years provision by making sure that:
  - teaching assistants receive suitable guidance and appropriate professional development
  - assessment is linked with the early years areas of learning and informs planning for progression in each area
  - teachers and teaching assistants use opportunities to extend children's knowledge and skills during activities that children choose for themselves, particularly in developing their language, literacy and mathematical skills.

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 school'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 first monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 June 2016**

### **Evidence**

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the subject leader for English and mathematics and three members of the governing body. She also held discussions with staff, all pupils in key stage 2, seven parents and two representatives of the local authority. The inspector visited each classroom to observe pupils at work, to check their behaviour and to look at their books.

### **Context**

Since the inspection in October 2015, the headteacher has left the school and a new early years teacher has been appointed. The headteacher of Dearham Academy became executive headteacher of Northside during the autumn term. A new chair of the governing body and an additional governor have been appointed by the local authority. The early years team are all new to the school from December 2015. A new part-time teacher, who works across different classes, has also been appointed. Plans are in place for Northside to become an academy in the near future.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

- Strong, insightful and caring leadership from the executive headteacher is the key reason that Northside is on the road to recovery. She has quickly won the trust and confidence of governors, parents and pupils and united a fragile staff. Everyone is on board, all are embracing change and morale across the school is rising.
- No one is under any illusion that the improvement journey will be easy or swift. Shortcomings are deep rooted and far reaching. Untangling weak systems and poor practice has occupied a considerable amount of the new leaders' time. However, their perseverance is bearing fruit. Essential management procedures such as a fit-for-purpose assessment system, and whole-school approaches to teaching are now firmly in place. The foundations for further success are secure. The comprehensive action plan has underpinned recent improvements and is steering everyone towards a brighter future.
- Developing teachers' confidence and teaching skills is at the heart of leaders' work. Teachers' knowledge is being refreshed through many training opportunities and the chance to learn from good practice in other schools.
- Leaders' close checks on teaching, plus helpful advice and guidance, mean that teachers know what they need to do to improve their practice. However, when leaders look at pupils' books, the quality of pupils' learning does not have a high enough priority.
- Links with Dearham Academy are being exploited fully to build Northside's

- capacity to move forward on its own and tackle its shortcomings.
- The leadership of special educational needs has improved markedly because of this close support. A complete review of pupils' learning needs has led to extra help being directed to those pupils who require it most.
  - Teachers' ability to measure pupils' attainment accurately has developed considerably due to the opportunities to meet colleagues within other schools. The advice from a specialist leader in education is helping the early years team to transform this area of school.
  - Positive changes to how subjects other than English and mathematics are taught are making pupils' learning more interesting and relevant. Opportunities to take part in sporting activities, school performances and visits to places of interest are beginning to reinvigorate pupils' attitudes to school.
  - An external review of governance, which took place in January 2016, has helped to bring about some changes to the governing body. Structures have been reviewed and roles have been clarified. Governors are playing to their strengths and putting their expertise to good use. Governors visit school regularly to witness improvements for themselves and to gauge the views of staff and pupils.
  - The changes to governance have not gone far enough. Not all governors have a good enough understanding of the school's assessment data, the quality of teaching or the school's progress in tackling its weaknesses. The governing body's own action plan pays too much attention to structures and systems. It lacks sufficient detail on training to ensure that all governors are enhancing their skills.
  - In contrast, the external review of pupil premium spending, which took place soon after the previous inspection, has had greater impact. Spending has been reviewed and the strategies to support these pupils have been updated. Governors are taking a greater role in championing this group of pupils and staff have a better understanding of their role in closing achievement gaps. This is paying dividends. Disadvantaged pupils are making greater gains in their learning than has been the case in the past.
  - Pupils and parents are overwhelmingly positive about the recent changes at the school.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

- Teachers are soaking up the opportunities provided for them to improve their skills. Their positive approach is helping to lift the quality of teaching.
- Teachers are skilled in managing pupils' behaviour through warm and nurturing relationships. Teachers are providing greater opportunities for pupils to work together to discuss their ideas and to share their work. This is building pupils' confidence as well as tackling weaknesses in their speaking and listening skills effectively.
- Although improving, pupils' learning falters when teachers do not explain new learning well enough. Teachers do not check pupils' understanding to

make sure that any muddled thinking is unpicked swiftly. Sometimes work is too easy or too hard, because teachers do not always set the right level of challenge to build on what pupils already know or to plug historic gaps in learning.

- The teaching of mathematics and writing are beginning to improve because whole-school approaches are followed in each classroom.
- Pupils' books show better writing. A focus on key skills, alongside greater opportunities to put pen to paper, means that pupils are now writing for different purposes. However, pupils do not routinely use their improving punctuation, spelling and grammar when they write for themselves.
- Pupils are being exposed to age-appropriate mathematical ideas and problem solving is now a feature of teaching. Nonetheless, pupils are not developing as fluent mathematicians who can use their skills to solve a range of unfamiliar problems. This is because teachers are following the published scheme too closely. They are not paying enough attention to the vast spectrum of learning needs within each class and planning work to suit.
- Teaching in the early years has moved on apace. Staff work as a cohesive team to support children's learning through purposeful activities. Checks on children's learning are frequent and accurate.
- Improvements elsewhere in the curriculum are positive. Consequently, pupils are gaining a broader range of skills across different subjects. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 are developing as accomplished artists who can confidently sketch, paint and work with clay.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

- Higher expectations from teachers mean that pupils are gaining a stronger work ethic and an increasing sense of pride in their achievements. Pupils are willing workers with positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils do not shirk from work that makes them think hard. All pupils showed excellent resilience as they grappled with a mathematics problem in a lesson in Years 5 and 6. Their delight in solving the challenge shone through. Their self-esteem swelled as all gained a taste of success.
- Pupils follow instructions, listen attentively and show respect to each other and to the different adults whom they come across. This is equally true in the early years. Pupils' increasing enjoyment of school is reflected in their attendance rates, which are slowly starting to rise.
- Almost all pupils say that they feel safe. They agree that most of their peers behave well and do not waste time in classes.
- Some pupils think that bullying takes place at school. School records show that allegations of bullying are dealt with effectively. Pupils do not yet have a full enough understanding of different types of harmful behaviour.

## Outcomes for pupils

- There are promising signs of pupils making stronger progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is especially true in key stage 2, where almost all pupils have made better than expected progress since September 2015. However, this is only beginning to make a small dent in the legacy of underachievement.
- Despite their gains this year, pupils in Year 6 continue to have woeful gaps in their learning because of poor teaching in the past. Consequently, standards remain low. Too few pupils are likely to start secondary school with the skills and knowledge that they need to secure a successful future.
- Pupils' achievements elsewhere are a mixed picture. The proportion gaining a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year continues to be below average. The positive changes to how sounds and letters are taught have not yet lifted pupils' success in the phonics check in Year 1.
- Early information on the assessments at the end of key stage 1 indicates that most pupils are beginning to move forward. However, the work in pupils' books indicates that their progress is still slow.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are benefiting most from the recent changes. These pupils are beginning to outstrip others in the school. In contrast, too little attention is being paid to the most able pupils to ensure that they fulfil their potential.
- Pupils are working harder, but gaps in their learning continue to hold many back. While pupils are happy to write at length, weaknesses in their spelling and punctuation skills continue to get in the way of good-quality writing.
- Basic understanding of number is a barrier to many working at age-related expectations in mathematics. Too many are unable to rely on their quick recall of number patterns to help them to solve problems.
- Children in the early years concentrate hard and stay working at activities because they are interested and enjoy their time in school.
- Children are beginning to extend their skills and knowledge across all areas of learning when they work indoors. This is not the same when children choose to work outside. The activities on offer do not capture children's interest in the same way. Consequently, learning, especially for boys, falters.

## External support

- The local authority is delivering its planned actions effectively to support the school during this challenging period.
- Swift action to secure leadership for Northside has made a significant contribution to the school moving in the right direction.
- Officers from the local authority are keeping abreast of the school's progress. They are meeting with leaders frequently, attending meetings of the governing body and offering support to improve teaching. Their support and challenge is welcomed and valued by school leaders.