

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



13 September 2016

Mrs W Baxter
Principal
Ark Chamberlain Primary Academy
Oldknow Road
Small Heath
Birmingham
B10 0HU

Dear Mrs Baxter

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ark Chamberlain Primary Academy

Following my visit with Stephanie Peters, Ofsted Inspector, and Adam Hewitt, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 29–30 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in June 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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 school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2015.

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise the attainment and progress of pupils, especially in writing, by ensuring that:
 - work is matched to pupils’ different abilities and takes into account their starting points
 - pupils are given more opportunities to write at length across a range of subjects
 - the most able pupils are provided with appropriate challenge and the less able are given the support they need
 - disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are given the guidance they need to make good progress
 - the feedback teachers give to pupils consistently guides them on what they need to do to improve their work
 - the academy is less dependent on temporary supply teachers.

- Improve safeguarding procedures by:
 - providing training for all staff in safeguarding, child protection and the potential risks of radicalisation and extremism
 - ensuring that all staff are appropriately trained in issues of health and safety
 - ensuring that all staff and leaders are fully aware of child protection procedures
 - improving the links between the academy’s designated lead for safeguarding and the governing body.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - providing training and support for leaders to develop and fulfil their roles
 - clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the governing body and ensuring it holds leaders to account for their actions
 - effectively monitoring the impact of the pupil premium to ensure it provides value for money
 - ensuring that the academy has a stable and sustainable leadership team which is not reliant on external support
 - ensuring that the academy has a realistic view of its strengths and weaknesses and devises plans to address its priorities for improvement.

An external review of governance, including the use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 29–30 June 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, vice-principal and assistant principals. Meetings were also held with the chair of the local governing body, the teacher responsible for managing special educational needs provision and the regional director of Birmingham Primaries at Ark Schools multi-academy trust. Inspectors observed parts of lessons, some of which were carried out with senior leaders. Assessment information about pupils' progress and reviews of teachers' performance were considered, along with the school's improvement plan and the most recent review of progress carried out by Ark Schools. Inspectors met with groups of pupils to seek their views about their work, learning and behaviour. An inspector also spoke to some parents to discuss their views about the school and what it offers their children. The single central record was checked to ensure that the details for new staff have been added and that the school complies with safeguarding and staff vetting procedures. The focus of this visit was to establish the extent to which pupils' achievement and teaching are improving and the capacity of leaders, staff and governors to sustain improvement.

Context

There has been a significant turnover of teaching staff since the previous monitoring inspection in March 2016. Five supply teachers and two substantive class teachers will be leaving at the end of this term. Governors have appointed nine teachers who will start in September 2016. Two of the five assistant principals will be leaving at the end of this term, one of whom was appointed for one year as part of the National College of School Leadership's 'future leaders' programme to coordinate staff training. The other assistant principal is leaving due to promotion to another school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal has worked effectively with the local governing body and the sponsor, Ark Schools, to deal with difficult staffing issues. There are now fewer supply teachers covering vacant teaching positions and a reduction in the amount of inadequate teaching across the school. Carefully considered permanent staff appointments, including those due for September 2016, are continuing to provide stability. Improved assessment information about pupils' progress and accurate evaluations of teachers' performance are building further capacity for sustained improvement. There are challenging targets in the school's improvement plan for teachers and support staff to aim for.

Staff morale is high and staff feel supported but also aware that they are being challenged to improve the consistency of their teaching. The senior leadership team is monitoring lessons and pupils' work routinely and assessing teachers' performance. The most effective teachers are starting to influence the performance

of other staff. Senior leaders and governors now have a secure platform for more sustained improvement to the quality of teaching.

The systems and procedures that have been put in place to systematically check teachers' performance and provide appropriate support are an improvement since the previous inspection. Leaders monitor lessons, pupils' work and assessments more frequently to identify pupils who are at risk of falling behind. The principal is currently revising the school's curriculum by organising programmes of study into topics and themes that bring together a broad range of national curriculum subjects, knowledge and skills. Combined with increasingly accurate assessments of pupils' performance, teachers are now more informed about pupils' current attainment and progress. However, while assessment has improved, not all teachers use these assessments enough to identify the most appropriate strategy, or interventions, to help pupils catch up. Leaders accept that, despite the progress that has been made, there remains too much teaching that requires improvement and pupils in too many classes are not reaching or exceeding age-related standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

Regular book reviews, learning walks and drop-in visits to lessons undertaken by senior leaders mean that teachers are more accountable and are much clearer about what outcomes to expect from each lesson. Nonetheless, heads of year, senior leaders, teachers and support staff have yet to improve learning enough in all lessons.

Systematic reviews of the quality of teaching challenges senior leaders to report to Ark Schools and the local governing body on the impact that teaching is having on improving pupils' attainment and progress. An assistant principal coordinates training and professional development which is helping to focus on some important aspects of teaching, such as improving pupils' writing and coaching teachers to improve their practice.

Safeguarding procedures remain effective and are fit for purpose.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Although improving, the teaching remains inconsistent because of staffing instability and some teachers do not offer the right level of challenge in lessons, particularly for the most able pupils. The most effective and consistent teachers check and intervene while pupils work to correct any misunderstandings or errors. The scrutiny of pupils' work in books shows that there remain inconsistent expectations and some pupils make repeated errors that slow their learning and limit how much progress they make in writing and mathematics.

As reported at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, the form and structure of pupils' handwriting is improving, especially in those classes where expectations remain consistently high. Observations of lessons and pupils' work in books show that pupils are now expected to write more independently and with

increasing accuracy. However, in some of the lessons seen by inspectors, time is wasted going over work already covered and teachers do not consistently manage teaching assistants well enough to make sure that they intervene and support while pupils work.

One improvement is the way teachers plan work for different levels of ability. The tasks set for pupils to work out in mathematics, for example, usually consist of three levels of challenge. However, in some lessons, pupils choose the easier level of difficulty before moving on to harder tasks. This is partly as a result of their lack of confidence, but also because teachers and teaching assistants do not encourage pupils to start with more challenging work. This slows learning for the most able and does not encourage pupils to try more difficult problems.

The most effective practice was seen in a Year 6 mathematics lesson where the task set was particularly challenging. In this lesson, pupils were asked to choose which of three familiar household banks would be best to save money with. The teacher skilfully adapted the questions and provided pupils with enough information about different rates of compound interest. This approach encouraged pupils to work things out for themselves and apply their knowledge of percentages and decimal fractions before making a decision to establish which bank was the most profitable for the saver. This was challenging, stimulating and enabled pupils to make rapid progress, applying their calculation and mental arithmetic skills. More commonly, however, in many classes across the school, pupils have poor mental arithmetic skills and do not have enough opportunities to practise and improve these.

Teachers' marking is improving and is consistent with the school's marking policy. Teachers are increasingly providing helpful pointers for improvement and providing time for pupils to edit their writing and correct mistakes in mathematics. However, a scrutiny of pupils' work in books shows that some of the comments made by teachers are too vague or lack focus, so pupils are not always being told why their work is improving and the next steps in their learning.

Assessment systems to evaluate pupils' learning and progress without national curriculum levels continue to improve, as reported at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. However, senior leaders are not making sure that all teachers use assessment information about pupils' attainment and progress to provide work that matches their needs and abilities. Evidence from lesson observations and pupils' work during this monitoring inspection shows that this is still an area for improvement. The most effective teaching, for example in some classes in Year 4 and Year 6, builds on previous learning and teachers ask and probe through sharp questioning that is followed up by tasks that challenge and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils continue to behave well around the school and they try hard in lessons. The most effective learning takes place when pupils are fully engaged and challenged.

In some lessons, however, pupils are too passive and do not produce enough work if too little is expected of them.

Pupils spoke to inspectors with confidence and said that they enjoy coming to the school. This is reflected in above-average attendance rates and good punctuality. A group of pupils in Year 5 told an inspector that pupils behave well and enjoy the range of work provided by leaders and staff. There are good relationships between adults and among pupils.

Despite staff changes and the disruption caused by the use of supply staff or temporary teachers, pupils explained how much they enjoy their lessons and new topics; 'I am expected to listen and work hard', stated one pupil who went on to talk clearly about her learning targets. Another pupil confirmed, 'We have success criteria explained to us so we can check each time we write something to see if we are going to reach our targets.' These examples demonstrate that pupils are increasingly improving their writing, which is also evident in their work books.

In most of the lessons observed, pupils were busy and productive, but in some lessons they were passive because of a lack of challenge and continuity to their learning. When provided with enough opportunity, pupils happily engage in conversations with others and share ideas, for example in a Year 5 history lesson when observing illustrations depicting the Battle of Trafalgar. Leaders and teachers are increasingly providing lessons that hold pupils' interest and enthusiasm, although the tasks set for pupils in some lessons do not always encourage pupils to improve their speech and language and are too mundane. Nevertheless, in most lessons there is very little disruptive or off-task behaviour.

Pupils feel safe and secure. There have been good improvements to safeguarding and child protection procedures since the inspection that placed the school in special measures. Leaders, staff and governors have clearly defined roles and responsibilities to carry out risk assessments dealing with concerns that may arise about safeguarding. E-safety has been taught effectively across the school and pupils were very clear when asked by inspectors about the risks associated with using online messaging sites.

The British values of respect, tolerance and democracy are taught well. Pupils who met with inspectors explained very clearly their knowledge and understanding of different major world faiths, religions and customs. The school's leaders and staff continue to make a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Outcomes for pupils

There is a mixed picture to report. Pupils are achieving better in those classes where the teaching expects more and is consistent. However, there is still a lot of ground for pupils to make up in some classes across the school. There is evidence of accelerated progress in Years 4 and 6, but also some underachievement, mainly

in Years 3 and 5, especially where the teaching has been disrupted by the use of supply staff.

Assessments show that achievement gaps are closing between disadvantaged pupils and others, but attainment is still too low in reading, writing and mathematics. There are too many pupils, particularly in Years 3 and 5, who are not reaching or exceeding age-related expectations. The large majority of pupils are learning English as an additional language and many are hindered by the lack of opportunity to explain their answers fully in lessons. This stalls their progress in developing speaking and listening skills. There has been improvement since the previous inspection in those lessons where teachers now expect pupils to answer fully and improve their spoken English.

Interventions for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are being managed better now than previously. However, the impact of these interventions is not being monitored or evaluated closely enough to make sure that all pupils with additional learning needs make good progress. In addition, in some lessons, teaching assistants are not being used effectively enough to provide the right level of challenge for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The quality of pupils' independent writing is improving, particularly handwriting and spelling, as this has been a focus for improvement by the school's leaders. However, variations still exist in the standards achieved in writing and mathematics, reflecting inconsistent expectations set by teachers across classes and year groups.

External support

The multi-academy trust, Ark Schools, provides rigorous challenge to the school's senior leaders and governing body. Nonetheless, there is still some weak teaching in parts of the school that is not improving quickly enough and is partly due to staffing instability. Weaknesses in the quality of teaching and issues related to the lack of permanent teaching staff are now being addressed by Ark Schools, the local governing body and the principal. The appointment of more permanent teaching staff joining in September 2016 has been carefully planned to make sure that teachers joining the school have the necessary skills and track record to improve pupils' attainment and progress.