

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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



22 September 2016

Claire McMaster  
Marston Vale Middle School  
The Crescent  
Stewartby  
Bedfordshire  
MK43 9NH

Dear Ms McMaster

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Marston Vale Middle School**

Following my visit to your school on 12 September 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 January 2016. 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:

- Ensure that all subject leaders make effective use of the training provided to embrace the full range of responsibilities associated with their role. They should focus particularly on monitoring and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and a precise analysis of the progress of the most able and disadvantaged pupils within their subject areas.
- Accelerate the work being done to ensure that teachers' and subject leaders' assessments of pupils' progress are accurate, with particular regard to the assessment of pupils' writing.
- Improve the provision for the most able pupils by offering clear guidance as to what is expected of each teacher and subject leader and precisely monitor the progress that these pupils make.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, five subject leaders, five teachers, a group of 12 pupils, a representative from the Chiltern Learning Trust, and three members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Documents including those relating to safeguarding, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, curriculum plans and achievement information were evaluated. During two learning walks, one with you and one with the senior teacher with responsibility for leading teaching and learning, I observed pupils at work in lessons and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in books.

## **Context**

Significant changes have taken place at Marston Vale Middle School since the previous inspection. A senior teacher with responsibility for leading teaching and learning took up her post at Easter 2016. Adjustments have been made to the leadership of geography and history to cover for planned leave. Ten teachers have left the school and eight have arrived. You have introduced a 'house' system and reorganised where each subject and year group is taught within the school. There has also been a reduction in the number of vice chairs of the governing body, from two to one.

## **Main findings**

- Since the previous inspection, you have rightly focused on improving the quality of leadership and management. You have made appointments to the senior team that have enhanced the school's capacity to bring about the rapid improvements that are necessary in order for the school be judged good at its next section 5 inspection. Teachers and subject leaders appreciate the clarity of direction that is being set by you and your senior team. As a consequence of this clear leadership, staff morale is improving and there is a renewed sense of purpose across the school. You have also put in place robust processes to ensure that leaders and managers are held to account. There are regular line management meetings, subject leader meetings and professional development sessions. You have also made sure that there are opportunities for staff to share their good practice with others through activities such as your weekly 'give and gain' sessions. These have been welcomed by many staff. However, it is too early to judge the full impact of these processes.
- The previous report noted that the role of subject leaders was underdeveloped. There have been improvements in the effectiveness of subject leadership, brought about through the coaching and training that you have provided. There is effective practice in subjects such as physical education, religious education and mathematics. Leaders in these subjects

are accurately assessing pupils' progress, making appropriate amendments to the curriculum and holding teachers more clearly accountable for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, the provision in these subjects is strong or rapidly improving. However, more needs to be done to ensure that each subject leader is contributing effectively to the improvements taking place across the school. For example, too few subject leaders are precisely analysing the progress that groups of pupils, such as the disadvantaged and the most able, make within each subject. Consequently, some subject leaders are not routinely holding teachers to account for the progress that these pupils make.

- Governors are setting a clear strategic direction for the school. The governing body is providing experienced and knowledgeable support to you and your team. For example, governors have provided support in funding the additional post of a school data manager who is providing valuable support to the senior team. Governors know that they need to take further steps to assure themselves of the accuracy of the assessment information that they are provided with so that they are better placed to hold you and your senior leaders to account for the progress that pupils make.
- At the time of the previous inspection, teachers' assessments of the progress of their pupils were not as accurate as they should be. Under the enthusiastic leadership of your assistant headteacher, improvements are being made and the accuracy of assessment is improving. The introduction of frequent and regular moderation meetings and use of exemplar pupil work are helping to increase the accuracy with which teachers assess pupils' progress. This work needs to be accelerated where areas of inaccuracies remain, particularly with regard to the assessment of pupils' writing, which you acknowledge was too optimistic last year.
- You have been uncompromising in your insistence that pupils at Marston Vale Middle School deserve the highest quality teaching. You have outlined clearly the standards that you expect. You have correctly challenged practice that does not meet your high expectations and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving. This is something that pupils have noticed and appreciate. Pupils have responded well to teachers' higher expectations as to how they should write and how they present their work. As a consequence, pupils' work now reflects their obvious pride in what they do in many cases.
- Where expectations of what pupils can achieve are high, and learning is well planned to meet their differing needs, pupils demonstrate what they are capable of. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, due to the teacher's skilful planning and high expectations, pupils were achieving well. This best practice seen in some mathematics, English and science lessons is still not as commonplace as it should be. Some teachers are not making effective use of information about pupils' prior achievement to plan suitably challenging learning. For example, in some mixed-ability classes, pupils are provided with activities and resources that have not been sufficiently amended to meet their differing abilities and needs. While pupils, who are keen to learn, work

hard in these lessons, they are not provided with appropriate opportunities to achieve their best.

- Pupils are making improved progress in mathematics. The increasingly effective subject leader of mathematics has established higher expectations, made appropriate amendments to the curriculum and ensured that pupils receive the correct level of support, through initiatives such as the 'golden group'. As a consequence, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in mathematics was close to the national average in 2016.
- The provision for the most able pupils is still not as effective as it should be. There is a lack of clarity as to who is responsible for each aspect of this provision which means that there is not a cohesive approach to ensuring that the most able pupils are given opportunities to excel. Consequently, these pupils do not achieve as well as they could do, with low proportions of the most able pupils achieving the higher standards at key stage 2.
- Evidence seen in school indicates that, in mathematics and English, disadvantaged pupils are making better progress from their individual starting points than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. This is not the case across the curriculum as other subject leaders do not systematically evaluate the impact of their work on groups of disadvantaged pupils such as the least or most able.

### **External support**

You have made determined efforts to secure the help of local schools and other organisations to support the rapid school improvement that you are seeking to make. The Chiltern Learning Trust has provided support for middle leaders and teachers since December 2015. This has led to the improvements noted earlier in this letter. The accuracy of teacher assessments is also improving as a result of the moderation work being carried out with local middle and upper schools.

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

Yours sincerely

John Lucas  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**