

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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



4 November 2016

Helen Adair  
Howletch Lane Primary School  
Pennine Drive  
Peterlee  
County Durham  
SR8 2NQ

Dear Mrs Adair

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Howletch Lane Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 17–18 October 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:

- make sure that governors, senior and middle leaders and teachers know what success should look like when leaders do their interim checks on how well the school is doing
- continue to refine and improve middle leaders' monitoring and evaluation skills so that they focus precisely on the performance of different groups of pupils or particular improvements in pupils' skills
- make sure adults' expectations are consistently high, especially for the most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and most-able pupils who are also disadvantaged
- refine the assessment system to ensure that teachers are offering consistently

challenging work across all subjects

- strengthen senior leaders' understanding of assessment in the early years.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I also spoke to a group of middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's action plan and scrutinised a range of documents, including the recent local authority review report, minutes of the school scrutiny group and the school's analysis of recent test results. We made a series of brief visits to early years and key stage 1 classrooms together.

## **Context**

At the time of my visit, three members of staff, including the special educational needs coordinator, were taking maternity leave. Following the section 5 inspection which judged the school to require improvement, the leadership team has been reorganised.

## **Main findings**

Supported by your senior team and middle leaders, you took immediate steps following the section 5 inspection to reorganise the leadership structure. The opportunities offered by the new structure have been embraced by key stage and subject leaders, who now have the time to play a full part in monitoring the quality of the school's work. This enthusiastic team is developing its skills quickly. It undertakes reviews of pupils' work and regularly observes learning. Initially, its focus was too broad but it has responded to the advice and coaching by the local authority officers and is developing a sharper focus on the progress of different groups of pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils, most-able pupils and those most-able pupils who are also disadvantaged. Key stage and subject leaders have sound plans to make better use of the information they gather to make sure improvements are put in place quickly and checked on regularly.

The school's action plan is focused on the correct priorities and there are helpful 'milestones' designed to support leaders, including governors, to check on the effectiveness of actions to improve the school. However, the plans are not always clear about exactly what leaders expect to see at interim checks. Sometimes the milestones are simply a check that tasks have been completed rather than spelling out the intended impact. This makes it difficult for teachers to understand exactly what is expected of them and for governors to check with confidence that actions are having the desired effect on improving the school.

Leaders have made some important improvements to the assessment system to

make sure expectations for pupils' progress and attainment are clear. This remains a work in progress but is becoming more useful and used more consistently to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can do, particularly in English and mathematics. Middle leaders are candid in acknowledging this is not as strong in other subjects. Teachers now use helpful assessment grids which make each pupil's progress clear to see and help leaders to hold teachers accountable for the progress of the pupils for whom they are responsible. Middle leaders describe this as 'putting a name to the number' and report that the discussions they have with teachers as focused and helpful. You and the deputy headteacher acknowledge that you do not have a secure understanding of assessment in the early years to help you offer effective challenge.

Teachers are now routinely using assessment information to offer an appropriate level of challenge for pupils of differing abilities. Pupils are generally grouped by ability and the most able are asked to complete work designed to stretch them and challenge their thinking. Sometimes teachers do this skilfully and pupils can move seamlessly to tasks that deepen their understanding. However, this is not consistent and we observed an example of most-able pupils finishing their work quickly and waiting for the next task. There are also occasions when the teachers do not respond quickly enough when pupils grasp an idea more rapidly than the teacher had anticipated and, on these occasions, progress slows.

Interventions provided for pupils who need to improve their reading and writing skills are now routinely evaluated by leaders. There are some early signs of success, for example in pupils increasing their reading ages following specific sessions with teachers and teaching assistants.

Governors have developed a better understanding of how well pupils are doing, by making use of published information and external experts, as well as information provided by the school. They know they still have work to do and they have taken a sharp look at their own performance. They are using the support of the local authority to make sure their challenge to the school is more precisely focused. Governors recently arranged a review of the quality of their own work although this was not recommended in the inspection report. Governors are keen to embrace the findings of this report but it is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of their response.

### **External support**

The school has valued the effective support of the local authority. This has been particularly helpful in securing improvements to the indoor and outdoor areas for early years. This has included local authority advisers helping staff to arrange resources to promote good-quality learning opportunities and supporting staff in developing their work to challenge children's thinking and move their learning on. Success can be seen in the recent improvements in the number of children who reach a good level of development.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt  
**Senior Her Majesty's Inspector**