

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Sian Thomas
The Bridge Short Stay School
Appleton Drive
Ellesmere Port
Cheshire
CH65 7AR

Dear Mrs Thomas

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Bridge Short Stay School

Following my visit to your school on 27 April 2017, 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 May 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in June 2014, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- revise its action plan to include measurable targets, linked to outcomes for pupils
- carry out frequent reviews of the school's action plan, using up-to-date information about the school's performance, so that any issues can be identified quickly
- make sure that the information about pupils' performance is put to good use by teachers, leaders and governors to improve outcomes.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school, the deputy head of school, the chair, vice-chair and other members

of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation and action plan were evaluated. The inspector also visited lessons with the deputy head of school. Documentation was scrutinised, including minutes of governing body meetings and the school's self-evaluation.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, a new chair of governors has been appointed, one governor has resigned and another governor was removed as a result of poor attendance at meetings. Three new governors have been appointed. In addition, an associate governor has taken up post.

The local authority has moved the provision for pupils who have medical needs to another pupil referral unit. This is a temporary arrangement which is due to be reviewed shortly. Consequently, the number of pupils on the school's roll has reduced.

The profile of pupils who attend the school has changed since the inspection. There has been a marked increase in the numbers of pupils who join the school in key stage 3.

Main findings

By your own admission, the school was disappointed with the outcome of the inspection. At the time, staff felt that the school had made considerable progress since the previous section 5 inspection. However, governors and senior leaders set to work quickly, determined to address the weaknesses highlighted by inspectors. You have used the time since the inspection well to implement the changes required. You now have a more accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Senior leaders and governors are working closely together to move the school forward. Consequently, the school has taken effective action in addressing the areas for improvement over the past year.

You have not buckled under the challenge from senior leaders in the local authority, as you have been held to account for the school's performance. Rather, you have strengthened as a leader. You have a clear vision for the school. Together with your senior colleagues and governors, you are unswerving in your determination to make The Bridge a successful school.

The deputy head of school, who is in charge of data, has developed an assessment and tracking tool which is tailored to the needs of the school. He has adopted a measured approach to implementing the school's new assessment policy and procedures, so that teaching staff have had time to become familiar with the new approach. However, he recognises the need to insist that subject leaders take over responsibility for the collation and analysis of their departmental data now.

Moreover, he understands that it is imperative that the formative assessment approach he has developed becomes embedded in teachers' day-to-day practice so that it informs their lesson planning.

Like your deputy head of school, you also understand that the time has come for the next stage of your improvement journey. You have put in place the infrastructure required. You now need to focus on ensuring that these changes make a positive difference to pupils' outcomes.

We agreed the time has come to make effective use of the wealth of information you now have at your fingertips. First of all, this information will help you to pinpoint accurately how well the school is doing using the performance indicators set out in your school self-evaluation. You can be absolutely certain then that you have identified the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately. Next, you must make sure that you set measurable targets for the priorities you have set out in your action plan. As you evaluate performance at key milestones along the way, you can use patterns and trends to determine quickly what is working and what is not. This will make sure that you capitalise on the changes you have made.

We discussed at length how best you might 'benchmark' your performance. It was clear that you wish to aim high. It is your intention to measure the pupils' progress against that of their peers with similar starting points in mainstream schools. This will help you set ambitious targets so that your pupils catch up quicker. Your deputy head of school has already started this work.

You have embraced the opportunities over the last 12 months to raise the profile of The Bridge. You have made sure you are now a key partner in planning and delivering the continuum of provision for pupils in Cheshire West and Chester. You have forged strong partnerships with senior colleagues in local secondary schools. There is now a greater understanding among these colleagues about the work that the school does, as well as among local authority senior officers. Local authority colleagues recognise the key role that the school plays and have rallied to help you get the resources and support you need to do this successfully.

Governors are not resting on their laurels. They are clear that there is still much to do if they are to meet the high standards they have set themselves. They are keen to ensure that their wealth of experience, expertise and skills are put to good use, through the introduction of regular visits to school.

We discussed that while academic performance is a key measure of your pupils' success, given that many of your pupils have experienced failure in their previous schools, it is important to also monitor their attendance and behaviour. You already have this data and are confident you can make better use of it.

You have not taken your eye off other aspects of the school's work. Your head of school has further strengthened the school's work around safeguarding. She is

making good use of the information generated through your online reporting tool. She has quickly picked up on emerging risks for your pupils and made sure that support is put in place to raise awareness of these risks and keep pupils safe.

You highlighted the changing profile of the school population. The head of school recognises the need to review your curriculum offer in response. She recognises that 'tweaks and add-ons' are no longer sufficient. You have prioritised this as part of the next steps of your journey.

You have made links between pupils' achievement and teachers' performance. You understand that your teachers are key to your pupils' success. You have made sure that teachers are taking greater responsibility for evaluating their own performance. You recognise the importance of understanding the quality of teaching and learning accurately and making sure that teachers have the support they need to improve practice. You insist that all teachers observe strong practice in mainstream schools and engage with specialist leaders of education from the local teaching schools alliance. This will help you improve the quality of teaching.

You have made progress in addressing the weaknesses identified at the inspection. You know that there is still much work to be done. The team is buoyed up by the progress they have had over the past year.

External support

At the time of the inspection, your school worked in isolation. You have embraced the plethora of support which has been offered by the local authority, the local teaching school alliance and your independent school improvement partner. You have ensured that you have used this support judiciously to tackle the areas requiring improvement.

The school commissioned an external review of governance as a matter of urgency, following the inspection. The new chair of governors has used these findings as a catalyst for change. She has made sure that the governing body have stepped up to the mark. Governors provide a well-judged balance of support and challenge to senior leaders now. This transformation in leadership has been key in securing the school's improvement over the past year.

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

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector