

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Margot Tyers
Newark Orchard School
Appletongate
Newark
Nottinghamshire
NG24 1JR

Dear Margot Tyers

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Newark Orchard School

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 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 January 2017. 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, senior and curriculum leaders, four members of the governing body and the school's independent education adviser to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Together with leaders, I visited all classes in the school and looked at the learning in pupils' books. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's development plan and its self-evaluation, the review of governance, the governing body action plan and minutes of the meetings of the governing body. I also considered examples of the school's monitoring, action plans written by subject leaders, records of the teaching, learning and assessment meetings, and safeguarding records. I met with two groups of pupils, one from each site.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the chair of the governing body has sadly passed away. A new chair has been appointed.

Main findings

Leaders have taken decisive action in response to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. You have re-written your school development plan, so that it now includes clear success criteria and timelines. The new plan shows who will implement the actions, and who will monitor their impact. The actions contained in the plan are appropriate and are helping the school to improve. This new system makes it much easier for governors to see where the school has made progress and where further work is needed. Therefore, they are able to hold you to account more effectively for all aspects of the school's work.

The systems to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's work are now more rigorous. You have revised the programme of monitoring activities, so these activities focus more closely on the school's main areas for improvement. This more robust approach to quality assurance is ensuring that all staff have a clear understanding of leaders' expectations. In addition, it provides important information to governors on how the school is progressing.

Across the school, there is now a coherent approach to securing improvement. As one member of staff put it, the school development plan is now 'owned by all of us, not just by senior leaders'. You have reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the school's middle leaders, who are now more involved in monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Leaders I spoke with have a clear understanding of the school's priorities for improvement, and of their role in addressing these. For example, the curriculum leaders carefully check staff are using assessment effectively when planning learning. They provide you and governors with feedback on the quality of planning across the school. This is helping to ensure that all teachers use assessment effectively, include regular opportunities for assessment and plan learning for pupils that builds on what they know and can do.

In the sessions we visited it was clear teachers had taken pupils' prior learning into account when planning the activities. For example, in the Year 9 class, pupils worked on different tasks according to the skills they needed to develop. While one group practised identifying shapes, another worked on a more challenging task with the teacher to recognise and name angles in a shape. Through your own monitoring, you have recognised that there are times when the most able pupils are not challenged as well as they could be, and we saw some examples of this in our visits to classes.

Subject leaders have carried out reviews of teaching, learning and assessment of their subjects across the school, and have provided senior leaders with reports, outlining key strengths and areas for improvement. The leader for English has used these findings to put in place a well-thought-out action plan that sets out clear and measurable steps to improve the teaching of English across the school. For example, the plan recognises the need to ensure that phonics is taught consistently well across the school.

Since the previous inspection, you have reviewed the school's assessment system, since you recognised that it was not capturing all pupils' learning and progress effectively. You set up a working group to address this issue and have devised a bespoke scheme of assessment that will take account of all pupils' starting points, and set ambitious but realistic targets for their achievement. These new pathways for assessment are at an early stage of development, but the signs are promising. You now have a clearer picture of pupils' progress across different subjects, including English and mathematics, and have taken action to address those areas where pupils were not making consistently good progress.

You have ensured that professional development for teachers links more closely with the school's areas for improvement. The teaching, learning and assessment meetings enable staff to share best practice and work together on the school's priorities for improvement. For example, middle leaders have shared their findings from their learning walks at these sessions. Teachers' targets for performance management are now aligned with the school development plan.

It was clear in the sessions we visited and in the work in pupils' books that teachers have a clear understanding of the importance of capturing small steps of progress, so pupils can move on quickly. Teaching assistants are now more involved in the assessment of pupils, using their in-depth knowledge of the pupils to contribute to the records of the progress pupils make. The 'comment sheets' are used well to record what pupils are able to do and set targets to be achieved. Pupils we observed had a clear understanding of what they needed to do to achieve their targets. In the sessions we visited, the learning had been planned to meet their needs and they settled quickly to it. They worked with perseverance and resilience on their individual targets, carefully checking and practising their spelling, for example. In a key stage 1 class, there was cause for real celebration when one pupil successfully spelled out his name. In a key stage 2 class, pupils reflected on their own and others' achievements during the previous week, and enjoyed receiving stars for their efforts.

Governors have responded positively to the findings of the review of governance. For example, they have put in place their own action plan to improve their effectiveness. They have ensured that they have acted on each of the recommendations, for example by taking part in training to understand data. However, currently they do not have a system to measure the effectiveness of the actions they take.

Nonetheless, governors are deeply committed to the school and determined to ensure its rapid improvement. They now take responsibility for different aspects of the school development plan, and so can check more rigorously on its implementation. Because assessment systems have improved, governors now have clearer information on the progress pupils are making across the school. Governors are, therefore, more able to hold leaders to account for the progress the school is making. They ask insightful questions of leaders. For example, they have asked whether improvements in pupils' mental health can be included when measuring outcomes. They have clear ideas about how they wish to further improve their own effectiveness, for example by having a better understanding of the effectiveness of the curriculum across the school.

External support

The school has drawn on the services of an independent education adviser to provide an external evaluation of its work and to help leaders to identify the next steps that are needed to ensure that the school continues to improve. This support has been effective in enabling leaders to see what still needs to be done to ensure that systems are as tight as they need to be. This support is commissioned by the local authority.

The local authority has also carried out the review of governance. This review has led to improvements in governance.

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

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan

Her Majesty's Inspector