

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr David Roundtree
Executive Headteacher
Scholes (Elmet) Primary School
Station Road
Scholes
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS15 4BJ

Dear Mr Roundtree

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Scholes (Elmet) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 November 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 for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- secure rapid improvements in teaching so that all pupils make fast progress from their different starting points in reading and mathematics in key stage 2
- develop and implement an effective approach to identifying and tackling errors and misconceptions in pupils' mathematical knowledge and understanding
- update the school improvement plan and pupil premium strategy so that they link more closely to the priorities and actions identified in the school's self-evaluation.

Evidence

During the inspection, I had meetings with you, the head of school, senior and middle leaders, four representatives of the governing body and the school's improvement partner to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited lessons with senior leaders, talked to pupils and looked at the work in their books. I evaluated the school's action plan and looked at a range of documents relating to self-evaluation, the school's safeguarding arrangements, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare.

Context

The acting head of school has been appointed to this post permanently since the last inspection. A senior leader has been appointed as a specialist leader of education and there have been a number of changes to middle leadership roles. Four governors have joined the governing body and a new chair of governors has been appointed.

Main findings

You and your senior leaders are tackling the areas requiring improvement identified at the school's last inspection with focus and resolve. Together with middle leaders and staff, you are a strong and increasingly cohesive and effective team. Governors are making a stronger and more influential contribution to improving the quality of education at Scholes (Elmet) Primary School. They are working in a more organised and systematic way and are bringing a sense of energetic purpose to the way they support and challenge you and your colleagues.

I was interested to find out whether you and your senior and middle leaders are improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You are monitoring the quality of teaching more effectively because you are looking more closely at the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. You are routinely checking the work in pupils' books, observing in lessons and reviewing information about the progress pupils are making. This is helping you to pinpoint what is working well and what needs to improve. I could see the impact of this work on pupils' learning and progress in the lessons I visited with you and your senior leaders and by looking at the work in pupils' books. The pupils I spoke to said that they find the work they are set interesting and fun. Importantly, you are using external support to help your middle leaders develop their skills in monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They value the high-quality support they receive, for example from your school improvement partner. Nevertheless, you know that improving teachers' practice and accelerating pupils' progress, especially in key stage 2, remain important priorities. It is vital that pupils in key stage 2 make the faster progress needed to achieve the outcomes they deserve by the end of Year 6.

I was also keen to check if you are improving the mathematics curriculum and your approach to teaching mathematics, again, especially in key stage 2. This is because, over time, pupils in Years 3 to 6 have not been making fast enough progress in mathematics. This work is being purposefully and energetically led by a senior leader who is also a specialist leader of education in mathematics. The curriculum has been radically re-designed and pupils now have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to reason and solve problems. I could see evidence of the school's new approach in the Year 3 and 4 lessons I visited with a senior leader. Mathematical concepts were explained and modelled clearly by teachers and pupils were questioned skilfully about their ideas and understanding. Pupils worked enthusiastically in pairs and small groups, confidently discussing problems using the correct mathematical language. The work in some pupils' books showed that, on occasion, errors and misconceptions in their understanding had not been tackled before they moved onto a new task. The school improvement partner had also noticed this inconsistency in teachers' practice. We agreed that tackling misconceptions quickly and making sure pupils are able to use their mathematical knowledge and skills confidently, fluently and accurately before moving onto new work are important next steps.

I wanted to know whether the recommendations from the external reviews of governance and the school's use of pupil premium funding have been acted upon. There have been significant changes to the school's governance since the last inspection. You have used the recommendations from the external review of governance well. As a result, governors have clear roles and they are increasingly knowledgeable about key areas of the school's work. You told me that governors are challenging you more effectively about the impact of your actions on the quality of teaching and the outcomes achieved by pupils. Importantly, governors have an accurate picture of the school's performance and clear view of what is needed to move the school to good. You said that the review of the school's use of pupil premium funding was helpful but not as incisive as the review of governance. The information about the school's use of pupil premium funding and its impact on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils on the school's website lacks precision and is out of date. You recognise that sharpening up the school's pupil premium strategy is an important next step.

I also wanted to review your self-evaluation and check whether your action plan provides a strong starting point for securing improvement. Your self-evaluation is detailed and comprehensive. The judgements you have made are supported by a good range of evaluative information. It gives a clear picture of the school's effectiveness. Your action plan is sharply focused on the aspects of leadership and management and teaching, learning and assessment which were identified as requiring improvement at the school's last inspection. There are robust arrangements for monitoring this plan and checking whether your actions are having the intended impact. You know, however, that your current action plan is too limited in its scope. In part, this is because it does not link closely enough to your summary self-evaluation.

Finally, I was keen to find about how you are communicating with parents and whether you are following up incidents and accidents systematically and robustly. I also wanted to make sure that you are vigilant in identifying and supporting pupils who need help and protection. You explained that you have changed the organisation of meetings with parents and improved the reports you provide for families. You have created more opportunities for families to tell you what they think. For example, you made time to speak to parents about the findings of the school's last inspection and you encouraged them to give you their views. Crucially, you have implemented better systems for following up accidents and I could see that you are recording and following up behaviour incidents and incidents of bullying thoughtfully and in a more systematic way. The case files I examined showed that pupils who are vulnerable are identified quickly. They show that you work closely with other professionals and services and give pupils and their families the help and support they need.

External support

The external support you receive is well coordinated and effective. Experienced leaders from within the Sphere Federation are contributing well to the drive for improvement in teaching, learning and assessment. Your strong partnerships with other primary schools are equally effective. This is illustrated, for example, by the way you are moderating teacher assessments with middle and senior leaders from other schools. As a result, you are confident that teachers are assessing pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding accurately and well. You have a high regard for the work of your school improvement partner because he gives you, senior leaders and governors detailed and objective information about the school's performance. In addition, he is skilfully developing the confidence and ability of your middle leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Whittaker
Her Majesty's Inspector