

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



1 October 2018

Stuart Busby
Northleigh CofE Primary School
St Peter's Road
Cowleigh Bank
Malvern
Worcestershire
WR14 1QS

Dear Mr Busby

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Northleigh CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 September 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, your leadership team, six staff members and four governors. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative for the diocese, who was previously the school improvement officer commissioned on behalf of the local authority. You and I observed teaching in all key stage 2 classes and scrutinised pupils' work. I spoke with pupils about their learning in class and during lunchtime. I checked the school's single central record and considered the pupil premium review and information in relation to pupils' achievement. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, governors have extended your contract as interim headteacher from one year to two. Two assistant headteachers have left the school but two new assistant headteachers have been appointed with effect from the start of this term. One is new to the school, and one is an internal promotion. You have also

changed the leadership structure with effect from the start of September. This now includes four phase leader posts. There has been no change to the leadership in the early years, but new roles have been created to lead and manage key stage 1, and lower and upper key stage 2. Most staff with senior leadership responsibility are therefore new to their roles this term. There has also been a recent change in those members of staff leading literacy, numeracy and assessment.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since your appointment, you have been tenacious in your ambition to improve the school. You have set a clear direction and raised expectations of staff and pupils. This is bringing about significant improvement. However, you are perceptive and honest about the work that needs to be done to improve the overall effectiveness of the school. Pupils enjoy school, behave well and feel safe. Staff appreciate the clear direction and support that you provide. They have responded well to the changes and are resolute in their commitment to improving the education and experiences for pupils at Northleigh CofE Primary School. They have welcomed the increased accountability, and the support and training provided. They say that they feel valued as individuals and that their well-being is considered. Consequently, despite the significant workload, staff morale is high and there is a positive atmosphere in the school.

With the support of the diocese and that commissioned on behalf of the local authority, you have acted swiftly to tackle the issues identified at the previous inspection. You have formulated long-, medium- and short-term plans to improve leadership and teaching. Priorities and the actions identified are appropriate. Clear and measurable milestones enable you and your governing body to highlight when actions have been completed. However, leaders have not evaluated actions shown in last year's plan in terms of impact. It is therefore unclear which actions are leading to success and which are less effective. For example, a key performance indicator was to enable disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils to make good progress, and for there to be an increased proportion achieving age-related expectations in all year groups. The plan does not indicate whether this has been achieved, so the improvement cycle is incomplete. The lack of evaluation also prevents leaders from providing additional support where needed. The school improvement plan for the current year has not yet been finalised. This should be done as a matter of urgency.

You have accelerated the effectiveness of middle leaders by working alongside a local outstanding school. Good quality coaching and support has been provided for the coordinators for literacy, numeracy and special educational needs. Leaders have introduced new systems and as a result, middle leaders have a clearer overview of their roles. New initiatives are helping to raise standards. However, due to revisions to the senior leadership team, most leaders are new to their positions. There is a need to extend training to the phase leaders to ensure that they are effective in their roles. Additional training is also needed for both middle and senior leaders in

their use of assessment information. Some leaders do not have sufficient skills and knowledge to access or analyse the data available to them, and so determine where strengths and weaknesses in their area lie.

Teaching staff have also benefited from good-quality training. This has helped them to improve their practice. You have introduced a robust performance management system, which holds teachers more accountable. Objectives set are linked to the teacher standards and school improvement priorities. School leaders and governors also carry out regular monitoring. This provides staff with clear feedback on their practice. You have retitled staff meetings 'professional development meetings' to raise expectations and focus on school improvement. Where teaching performance is a concern, you have initiated a 30-day support plan. These plans have had a good degree of success for some staff. Where it has not had the intended impact, staff have chosen to leave the school. As a result, the profile of teaching is now stronger than at the time of the previous inspection.

You have used your good understanding of assessment to overhaul the systems in place. Improved tracking is evident, and teachers can access information about the performance of different groups, cohorts and classes readily. In consultation with the school improvement officer and diocese, you chose following your appointment in September 2017 to re-assess all pupils in Years 1 to 6 to establish a secure baseline and starting point. You did so because the consensus was that teacher assessments were not accurate. Standardised tests were therefore used for this purpose. There was a wide discrepancy between the results and previous assessments of pupils. For example, Year 2 end-of-key stage test results in mathematics in July 2017 showed 81% of pupils working at age-related levels. The same cohort on entry to Year 3 were shown to have only 46% working at the required level. Working from this lower baseline has markedly increased estimates of pupils' subsequent progress. You and your governors have acknowledged the issues in this area but are confident that assessments are now accurate and that this year, progress information will be reliable and secure.

Recent training has made teachers are more confident in their assessments and given them a better understanding of the levels that pupils should be working at. The local authority agreed the school's judgements when they checked the results awarded for Year 2 pupils in reading, writing and mathematics in 2018, together with Year 6 writing results. You have also introduced discussions with teachers about pupils' progress. These have ensured that staff have a detailed knowledge of each pupil and how well they are achieving. They have also enabled staff to identify which pupils need additional support, and leaders to address this.

The school's marking and feedback policy has also been revised. Most teachers adhere to it and provide comments to help pupils improve or set short tasks to check pupils' understanding. The process has aided teachers' assessment. However, there is still a lack of consistency between staff in the sources of information that they use to assess pupils. Evidence used ranges from standardised tests, end-of-

key-stage test papers and teachers' judgement against national curriculum statements to standalone tasks or tests from commercial schemes of work. These sources can generate differing results. The accuracy of assessment is therefore improving but needs further work.

Teaching and learning in writing and mathematics has improved. External consultants have provided valuable support in helping teachers focus on planning sequences of lessons. Staff now have their planning, preparation and assessment time (PPA) at the same time so that they can work collaboratively. This has led to greater consistency within year groups. A new mathematics programme has been introduced to improve pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills. Pupils' books show early signs of impact in this area but there is still a way to go. While teaching staff have received training in mathematics mastery, support staff have not, so that they are not as skilled at supporting the pupils, especially the most vulnerable pupils with whom they often work. Additionally, school information shows that only a small number of pupils are working at greater depth. Weaknesses still therefore exist in mathematics. While improvements have been noted in writing attainment, inspection evidence shows that pupils in lower key stage 2 are not secure in their use of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Spelling is particularly weak. Pupils carry forward misspelled common words as they move through the school, as these are not picked up and addressed in key stage 1.

A robust and carefully planned cycle of monitoring the quality of teaching is in place. Leaders and governors regularly check that pupils' needs are being met and that books reflect good progress. New phase leaders are also involved in monitoring and will now be responsible for improving the quality of teaching and learning in their respective phases.

Our visits to classrooms showed that teachers are attentive to pupils' needs and provide additional help and support during the lesson. Through circling and checking, they identify when a pupil is stuck and respond swiftly. Teachers share clear learning objectives at the outset of lessons and instructions are comprehensible. As a result, pupils know what to do and are confident to get on with their work. Pupils take pride in their work and present their work neatly.

While there are clear signs of improvement in teaching, some weaknesses remain. Pupils' progress is slow when the work presented is too difficult and pupils are not secure in basic skills, for example rounding to 100,000 when not secure with rounding to 10 beyond 100. Conversely, there is limited challenge for some pupils, especially the most able, and this reduces their progress. The pace in lessons is also sometimes too slow. This affects pupils' levels of attention and the amount of work they complete. Overly-directed teaching diminishes pupils' ability to work independently and think for themselves. Weaknesses were also detected during the inspection in teachers' own literacy ability, with poor spelling and punctuation noted in the marking of pupils' work. This reinforces poor writing rather than modelling accurate literacy.

Pupils are keen to learn and behave well. They are confident and demonstrate increasing levels of resilience and determination. This holds them in good stead for their transfer to high school. For example, they are less anxious and worried about examinations because tests are now part of school routines. Their resilience and team-working skills are also developed through school activities and events. Year 6 pupils related how they overcame some of their fears during their outdoor education residential visit by going on a giant swing. The next day almost all Year 6 pupils attended school despite their tiredness. Their attendance demonstrates the increased value you have placed on education, and pupils' commitment to do well at school. Celebration assemblies and rewards also serve to increase pupils' pride and confidence. Governors canvass pupils' views and ensure that the well-being of staff and pupils is an important priority for the school. This commitment underpins the caring ethos within the school.

Following the previous inspection, the governing body commissioned the local authority, in March 2018, to undertake a review of the spending of the school's pupil premium grant. This has been helpful in enabling leaders and the governing body to consider the importance and impact of the grant. As a result, there is a greater awareness of disadvantaged pupils within the school. Additional funding has also been secured through identifying additional pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding. However, the school did not meet statutory requirements last year by publishing the pupil premium statement on its website. Governors are also unclear whether recommendations made in the pupil premium review have been actioned. This is because you have not reviewed the report or incorporated recommendations into the school improvement plan. Wide gaps still exist in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school. You and the governing body recognise that you need to focus even more carefully on disadvantaged pupils to improve their outcomes.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector