

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



8 November 2018

Louise Regan
Headteacher
Hillocks Primary and Nursery School
Unwin Road
Sutton-in-Ashfield
Nottinghamshire
NG17 4ND

Dear Ms Regan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hillocks Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit with Vondra Mays and Peter Strauss, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 23–24 October 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills to confirm the 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school’s improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive

officer of the Diverse Academy Learning Partnership (DALP) multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Nottinghamshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2017.

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders' plans for improvement are fully evaluated so that governors can hold leaders to account and no opportunities for improvement are missed
 - leaders make full use of the information provided by the new assessment system to ensure that pupils of all abilities make the progress of which they are capable across a range of subjects
 - leaders with responsibility for subjects other than English and mathematics fully undertake their roles and responsibilities so that they can improve the quality of teaching and outcomes in their subjects
 - leaders analyse more closely the impact of the pupil premium funding on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils
 - leaders analyse carefully the impact of the primary sport funding
 - all governors are sufficiently skilled to hold leaders to account sharply for the impact of the work that they do.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to improve rapidly outcomes for pupils by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan more closely the next steps in learning for pupils so that pupils of all abilities can excel
 - ensure that teaching assistants' time is well used to improve pupils' progress
 - insist that pupils present their work as neatly as they can
 - provide pupils with opportunities to write at length across the curriculum, insisting that pupils sustain the standard teachers expect in English lessons
 - develop pupils' mathematical reasoning skills more deeply
 - intervene promptly, in a range of subjects, to move pupils on to more challenging work as soon as they are ready to do so.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - taking effective steps to reduce persistent absence and improve pupils' rates of attendance and punctuality
 - ensuring that lessons are sufficiently engaging and challenging so that low-level disruption is eradicated.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 23 October 2018 to 24 October 2018

Evidence

The inspectors met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the phase leaders for key stages 1 and 2 and for the early years, and subject leaders for English and for mathematics. They also spoke with representatives from the governing body and with two representatives from the local authority. They met with a member of the Diverse Academies Learning Partnership (DALP) and the associate headteacher. They listened to the views of pupils from different year groups. They observed learning in 16 lessons, four jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work from both the previous and the current academic year. They checked that the school's website complies with national guidance on what schools should publish. They examined the school's single central record and ensured that staff were well trained in safeguarding and that they knew how to report any concerns they might have. Inspectors also evaluated leaders' most recent school's self-evaluation documentation, along with the latest action plans and assessments of pupils.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, further changes in the school's leadership have occurred. The substantive headteacher returned from her year's secondment in April 2018. The deputy headteacher has now retired and the assistant headteacher has been appointed as the new deputy headteacher. A new phase leader for key stage 1 has been appointed from the start of this academic year. There is a new leader for the teaching of reading and an interim leader for writing. The regional schools commissioner has not yet allocated a sponsor for the school. However, a member of the DALP multi-academy trust has continued to support the school. He was previously the school's executive headteacher but is now in an advisory capacity as the associate headteacher.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have continued to write and revise plans that are helping the school to improve. This helps the governing body to see which actions have had the impact that leaders intend and which actions have not taken place when proposed, or have not proved sufficiently effective. Leaders' plans also include sensible action to cover aspects other than the key areas for improvement. For example, leaders judged that too few pupils across the school have secure phonics knowledge. They consider that this has hampered greater proportions of them attaining the expected standards in reading. As a result, leaders have very recently introduced a new system of teaching phonics. Staff have recorded some initial and positive information about the phonics skills of children in the Reception class. Leaders plan to monitor this new system rigorously and produce

timely and robust evidence to the governing body of its impact. A review of planning by DALP in January recommended that school improvement procedures would benefit from further alignment. As a result, DALP and the associate headteacher have helped leaders to write a clear calendar of activities, with precise dates, to quality assure improvements. This is cross-referenced to the school development plan. Plans also show how the associate headteacher is supporting members of staff in the early years to enable children to make better progress from their starting points.

Leaders have continued to ensure that all staff can assess pupils' outcomes with accuracy. Attainment at the end of the early years and key stage 1 has been moderated externally, both by DALP and by a local infant school that is graded outstanding by Ofsted. The new assessment system is becoming embedded throughout the early years, and the system in key stages 1 and 2 is continuing. These provide timely information on the proportion of pupils on track to reach age-related expectations across each year group and for different groups of pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils. Where the governing body has asked for further information on attainment, such as for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, leaders have provided it promptly. Every half term, teachers assess against the key objectives for blocks of work. Subject leaders are using this to identify pupils who are not making sufficient progress. They are challenging teachers to improve where it is not fast enough. Subject leaders are also providing their colleagues with useful training to help them improve. This includes teaching pupils to revise and edit their work and also how to use better vocabulary when they write. The subject leader for mathematics is experienced and, as a result, has had the greatest impact in securing better teaching. Senior leaders are aware, however, that the leader for writing is new to his role and that it is a temporary one. The headteacher has made it her personal priority to give all necessary support to ensure that the leadership of English becomes consistently good as quickly as possible, and remains so over time.

Leaders for subjects other than English and mathematics have continued to develop their effectiveness. They say that they feel well supported by senior leaders. Last term, senior leaders gave them good opportunities to conduct activities such as scrutinising pupils' work, discussing pupils' work with them and visiting their colleagues' classrooms to see how pupils are learning. For example, pupils told the leader for modern foreign languages that teachers often model how to speak French during lessons. However, pupils do not always remember the new vocabulary that they are being taught because they do not receive sufficient practice. As a result, the leader has identified the need for classroom displays to prompt pupils to remember new words and phrases in French. Now that subject leaders have written action plans, senior leaders are giving them time to undertake more monitoring later this term. They understand the importance of supporting those colleagues who feel less confident or skilled in their role to deliver better teaching.

The review of the spending of the pupil premium, conducted by the local authority, was completed in January 2018. It showed that leaders at the time demonstrated a clear understanding of the potential barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils and that staff had, rightly, placed a high emphasis on supporting the reading skills of these pupils. It recommended that leaders needed to ensure that they built up an overview of provision and conduct close monitoring of both the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. The school's tracking systems show that in many cases the proportions attaining, or on track to attain, at least the expectations for their age increased when compared to the same group the previous year. In most cases, the majority of disadvantaged pupils in the year groups had reached these expectations. In some year groups, such as Years 4 and 5, the proportion of pupils achieving expected standards had improved considerably. However, there remain too many year groups where not enough disadvantaged pupils have caught up, or are on track to catch up, with others nationally. A member of the governing body is now checking that leaders' provision for these pupils improves further and that the spending of the pupil premium is consistently effective.

Leaders now analyse the impact of the primary physical education (PE) and sport premium funding effectively. Their reports give helpful information that shows that participation in these areas has increased considerably. For example, in the 2016/17 academic year, no pupils participated in competitions and sporting events with other schools. In the past academic year, the school took part in 27 events. Nine in ten pupils in key stage 2 participated in these. The school's own survey, confirmed in the views of pupils inspectors met during the inspection, shows that almost all pupils express a deep enjoyment of sport. This is complemented by a good range of after-school clubs. Almost half the pupils taking part in these had not participated in the sport before. Leaders for this subject have ensured that parents' and carers' views are taken account of. Around 100 responses to an online survey of parents have contributed to improving provision.

The governing body has taken full notice of the recommendations of the review of governance that was completed by the local authority in the spring term of 2018. They have undertaken an audit of their own effectiveness to ensure that they can perform their strategic role effectively. The skills of the governing body are improving considerably. Their capacity has been recently strengthened by three new governors who are highly experienced in school leadership. One is an executive headteacher of two local infant schools, one of which is judged outstanding and the other is graded good. Governors possess the knowledge and key skills to challenge leaders and are doing so. Recent minutes of their meetings show they are unafraid to ask good questions regarding different aspects of the school's work and its impact. This includes checking that the school's appraisal system is fully operational and requesting further information from staff's monitoring activities. The pupil premium spending has become an

agenda item at meetings. Leaders are ensuring that governors are receiving up-to-date information, and further training, through the school's online information system provided for them.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

To help improve teaching, leaders have introduced new 'feedback sheets' for teachers to record, at the end of each lesson, how well they judge that pupils have learned. These sheets identify clearly those pupils who have understood fully what they are being taught. The work of these pupils is used at the start of the following lesson to show to those pupils who have misconceptions, or who have not yet learned sufficiently well. The sheet also identifies pupils who demonstrated errors in their basic skills, or whose presentation skills were not sufficiently good, or who made mistakes in their work. The sheets also have a space for teachers to write notes for themselves, for example 'revisit the difference between nouns and verbs'. An increasing number of teachers are using this well. However, inspectors found that not all teachers are yet taking sufficient notice of their assessments to plan well for their next lessons. As a result, some pupils are not being challenged to move on quickly enough while others are not being provided with good support to help them catch up. The school's phase leaders understand their need to check rigorously and regularly that any colleagues who are not using the feedback sheets sufficiently well are supported and challenged to do so.

At the previous monitoring inspection, it was judged that the time of teaching assistants was being used increasingly well to improve the progress of pupils. Recent monitoring by leaders showed, however, that this had not been sustained across all classes. Leaders have told teachers that they must share their expectations with teaching assistants prior to a lesson, discuss with them important questions to ask pupils, and explain what they must do if pupils do not understand. While inspectors saw a number of instances where teaching assistants were doing this, they also observed instances where some teaching assistants had not acted upon it. Senior and subject leaders have made providing clear guidance for teaching assistants a focus and to show the governing body compelling evidence that these staff are consistently used well throughout the school.

Work scrutiny undertaken by leaders has shown that pupils' presentation has continued to show an improvement. While this is accurate, scrutiny by inspectors shows that it is not consistently good. Pupils' exercise books reveal that, while a good proportion of pupils present their work neatly, some do not. Not all teachers are showing younger pupils well enough how to, for instance, form their letters correctly. As a result, letters within a single word are inconsistent in size, or reversed. A minority of older pupils also do not present their work neatly. This is because, in focusing on improving the content of what pupils write, not all teachers have paid sufficient attention to pupils'

presentation. Leaders have just introduced a new system to teach handwriting which is aligned to the school's new approach to phonics. However, its impact is too recent to evaluate. Leaders are arranging to undertake further monitoring of pupils' handwriting and further training for teachers to ensure that, by the end of the school year, it is consistently good across the school.

Pupils' work in subjects other than English shows that a majority of teachers are providing their pupils with good opportunities to write at length across the curriculum. For example, in April 2018, pupils in Years 3 and 4 were asked to write a recount of how they made cookies as part of their topic work. The teacher insisted that pupils write with correct paragraphs, spelling and punctuation, together with good presentation, with the same standards as those found in their English books. It was characterised by neat presentation and effective use of paragraphs and vocabulary. The frequency of opportunities for pupils to write at length across the curriculum is improving overall this term.

The leader for mathematics sets an example to her colleagues on how to drive up the quality of teaching in a subject. She demonstrates a secure understanding as to where teaching in mathematics is good and where it is not yet effective enough, and why. In the past academic year, she identified that pupils' number skills were not sufficiently fluent across the school. This was impeding their ability to be able to reason mathematically. She is at the forefront of implementing the school's new approach to teaching mathematics. She is providing training for staff and writing clear reports to the governing body. In order to improve outcomes in key stage 1, leaders have appointed the Year 4 teacher, whose pupils last year made some of the strongest progress in mathematics, to be the phase leader. Pupils' work shows that, in a very large majority of year groups, pupils' fluency in number is becoming embedded, and that they can therefore use their reasoning skills increasingly well. The subject leader for mathematics knows that although the proportion of current pupils on track to reach their age-related expectations is rising, it is not as high as it needs to be. She shows no complacency and is resolute in her insistence that all pupils must make consistently strong progress in mathematics. She has planned further action to bring this about with a commendable sense of urgency.

Pupils whom inspectors met told them how there are regular and increasing occasions when they are given more difficult work that makes them think deeply. Alternatively, they are asked to move on to more challenging work when they are ready for this. Inspectors saw clear instances where work was appropriate for pupils' different abilities, and where pupils were moved on well. In a mathematics lesson for pupils in Years 5 and 6, those who had shown fluency were working independently while those whose accuracy or speed needed further attention were being well supported to gain confidence first. However, pupils also told inspectors that there remained occasions where they are asked to repeat work in areas where they are already fluent. This mixed, though improving, picture was reflected in the work that inspectors looked at

during their visit. Phase, subject and senior leaders' monitoring is intensifying their work to support colleagues so that the progress of pupils across all year groups and in a wide range of subjects is not hampered by pupils being asked to repeat work unnecessarily.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' overall attendance, which had begun to improve, slowed by the end of the previous academic year. However, there has been a considerable improvement this term and attendance is currently broadly in line with the national average. As one pupil explained, 'Learning is more fun. That's why we want to come to school.' This term, far fewer pupils have also been persistently absent from school, and the greatest improvement has been seen for disadvantaged pupils. Currently, around one in ten pupils miss school regularly. However, leaders are fully aware that this is still above the national average and that this is still early in the academic year. For this reason, they are sustaining their focus on attendance until they can present the governing body with more convincing information showing that the improvement is sustained. Leaders have appointed a new leader to monitor pupils' attendance and have revised the information, support and challenge to parents whose children do not attend regularly enough. At the same time, they have introduced an improved system of rewards for pupils. The improvement in pupils' punctuality, found at the last inspection, has continued. Pupils remain keen to arrive at the school gates promptly, ready to begin their learning on time.

Monitoring of lessons by leaders, and by inspectors during the monitoring inspection, shows that low-level disruption is now very infrequent. Pupils do not behave in ways that stop their peers from learning. This is a considerable improvement and means that lessons proceed more smoothly. However, although pupils do not distract each other, inspectors noted that, at some point in around half of lessons they observed, some were not paying sufficiently close attention. In almost all of these instances, this was because the work teachers had given pupils did not inspire all of them to listen throughout, or some of them already knew or could do what was being taught. Although teachers notice when pupils are not paying sufficient attention, they do not consistently ensure that pupils re-engage with their learning as quickly as they need to.

External support

The local authority has undertaken reviews of both governance and the spending of the pupil premium. It has continued to fund external leadership support for the school from the DALP. This has allowed the representative, who was previously employed as the school's executive headteacher, to continue assisting the school in the capacity of associate headteacher. In addition, it has continued to write detailed and useful reports for leaders and governors regarding, for example, the progress that pupils have made. The local authority

remains committed to continuing its support for the school so that it becomes a good school as quickly as possible.