

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



14 February 2019

Mrs Denise Gardner  
Headteacher  
The Nethersole CofE Academy  
High Street  
Polesworth  
Tamworth  
B78 1DZ

Dear Mrs Gardner

### **Short inspection of The Nethersole CofE Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 12 February 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in March 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement, which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You and your newly formed leadership team have started to successfully address weaknesses in the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes. You started in post in September 2017 and have had to manage significant and unforeseen staffing disruption. Three members of the senior leadership team were absent for part of the 2017/18 academic year and several teachers have changed in the last few years. This period of instability has had an impact on the quality of education in the school. Staffing has been far more settled this academic year. You are combining well with leaders and governors to provide a clear direction of improvement. Early actions are positive, but it is too early to see the full impact of some of the strategies that have been put in place.

Self-evaluation by leaders and governors is accurate and used effectively. You have a realistic and clear understanding of the aspects of teaching and outcomes that need to be improved. The school improvement plan has focused actions and clear criteria, so that you can measure whether your actions have been successful. Teachers receive regular feedback on how to improve their classroom practice. You have adjusted these checks recently to make sure that teachers receive individualised feedback. This is helping to make sure that new initiatives are being implemented with growing consistency across the different classes in the school.

The areas for improvement that were set at the previous inspection have not been fully addressed. Over the last 12 months, there has been a greater focus on providing training for staff in new initiatives for English and mathematics. For example, a new project to develop pupils' enjoyment and understanding of reading is proving successful. However, there is too much variability in the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes. Attainment in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent), English and mathematics is not high enough in key stage 1. Furthermore, teaching of mathematics in key stage 2 is not challenging enough for pupils.

You have put in place a new leadership team this academic year. You work together well and there is a sense of purpose to get the best for pupils. However, several senior and middle leaders are new and are still getting to know the school. Consequently, not all leaders are having the fullest impact possible within their areas of responsibility. The multi-academy trust and the local academy board are providing ongoing support, so that leadership capacity is as strong as possible moving forwards.

Pupils' personal development is a strong feature of the school's ethos. Staff provide a high level of care and relationships are positive. Pupils are happy and they enjoy coming to school. Pupil comments during the inspection typified this view: 'We're all united as one', 'We are one big family', and 'We are a community and we look out for one another.' The Christian values of the school are evident in pupils' behaviours. Pupils also have tolerant views of other faiths and cultures. You arranged for your school to be partnered with a Muslim faith school in Birmingham. The older pupils involved in this project really enjoyed it. Pupils are provided with a broad range of opportunities to take on responsibility and develop their leadership skills. They spoke enthusiastically about being part of different teams, such as the ground crew, the digital leaders, the school council and the librarians.

Most pupils' behaviour across the school is positive and respectful. You have recently reviewed the behaviour policy to make it clear to pupils what sanctions are in place if behaviour falls below an acceptable level. This approach is being used with a growing consistency.

There is a supportive and engaging environment across the early years. Children enjoy their learning and get off to a positive start to their education. The majority of parents are happy with the quality of care and teaching in the school. There are some parents who are not as happy and feel that the staffing disruption has had an impact on the quality of teaching.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding leads are thorough in their work. Staff are quick to report concerns and leaders follow up these concerns robustly. Record-keeping is meticulous. You are tenacious at escalating any concern if you do not think that an external organisation is providing the level of support that it should.

The procedures for recording pre-appointment checks on staff are well organised.

The quality of training for staff has a positive impact on their understanding of safeguarding processes. All staff take this aspect of school life very seriously. As a result, the safeguarding culture is strong.

A thoughtful curriculum programme enables pupils to have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Pupils spoke about how they would tell a trusted adult immediately if they were concerned about something on the internet. Pupils on the digital leader team are proactive and recently led an assembly in school. They performed an adapted version of 'Little Red Riding Hood' to teach other pupils about online dangers. Visits from the police and fire service help to deepen pupils' awareness of certain risks.

### **Inspection findings**

- The proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2018 was well below the national average. In previous years, this same figure was above the national average. You responded to the 2018 decline by going out to see best practice and refining the way that teachers teach phonics. There are examples of strong phonics teaching. This is typified by a high level of challenge and staff expecting pupils to repeat new sounds accurately and efficiently. However, this is not the case across all phonics groups and some staff's subject knowledge is not as secure as it should be. Some pupils have picked up bad habits when joining sounds together to make words. For example, saying 'muh' and not 'mmm' when sounding out the letter 'm'.
- Attainment at the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics was not high enough in 2018. There was significant disruption to staffing in this phase of the school during the last academic year. This had a negative impact on the quality of teaching. There are now new staff in this phase of the school and they are gradually getting used to the new initiatives that have been introduced. Teaching is improving and attainment is gradually rising. However, some of the new approaches need to be embedded so that all pupils receive a sufficient level of challenge.
- You recognise clearly in your school improvement plan that mathematics teaching requires further development. Attainment by the end of key stage 2 has not been high enough over the last two years. Pupils' calculation skills are improving and most have efficient methods to add, subtract, multiply and divide numbers. You have developed a system for teaching where different challenge activities are introduced as the lessons progress. Pupils choose, or are directed to, a suitable level of challenge. Sometimes pupils with misconceptions are not supported quickly enough or some are not provided with enough challenge when they are finding something easy. Opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical understanding are becoming more regular. However, pupils' books demonstrate that their reasoning skills do not develop as well as they should over time.
- In the last academic year, attendance dropped and fell below the national average. So far this year, it has improved slightly and is moving in the right

direction. However, the attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are still too low. You have put in place several new approaches to both support and challenge families in relation to attendance. There is now a much clearer follow-up process if attendance falls below an acceptable level. You make good use of external services to support your work with families.

- The school was one of the first six schools to join the Birmingham Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust (BDMAT) in September 2017. During the last academic year, the local academy board worked closely with the trust to develop the scheme of delegation so that governance roles and responsibilities are clear. Governors appreciate that the trust carried out this process collaboratively. The local governing body is now called a local academy board and its functions have been refined. This process has taken some time to develop but is now clear. During this transition, the level of challenge and support from board members and the trust has been effective. Board members are skilled and knowledgeable. The trust has provided effective support through improvement visits, central training and network meetings for leaders. Board members and the trust are rightly prioritising the induction and ongoing development of new leaders.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is relatively new in post and has made a positive start. She has been provided with good support from a nationally recognised training course and from a more experienced SENCo. Staff have received guidance on how to support pupils with SEND in class and pupils' individual plans have effective small-step targets. There is not a clear and shared understanding of the criteria for identifying pupils for the SEND register. The proportion of pupils on the register is high. Leaders reviewed it in the autumn term and it has reduced slightly.
- The primary physical education (PE) and sport premium has not been spent as effectively as it should have been. Some of the funding has been used well to provide additional extra-curricular sports clubs at lunchtime and after school. However, last year there was a significant underspend and not enough planning is taking place to consider how to improve the quality of PE and physical activity. The evaluation of the impact of the funding is not rigorous enough.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff's phonics subject knowledge is of a consistently high standard
- newly introduced approaches to teaching are fully embedded, particularly in key stage 1
- mathematics teaching in key stage 2 provides sufficient challenge to pupils, particularly in developing their reasoning skills
- new leaders receive ongoing training and support so that they can have the fullest impact possible in their areas of responsibility
- there are clearly understood criteria for identifying pupils with SEND

- attendance rates rise for disadvantaged pupils and for pupils with SEND
- additional funding to develop PE and sport is fully utilised to improve the quality of provision and opportunities for pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Warwickshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matt Meckin  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and several other leaders. I met with members of the local academy board and two representatives from the multi-academy trust. I spoke to pupils informally and formally. I made short visits to 11 lessons and looked at a range of pupils' books. We spoke to parents at the start of the day and considered 50 free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the responses from the online questionnaire completed by pupils and staff.

I scrutinised various documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan and the documents that you use to check the quality of teaching. You shared with me the most recent assessments of pupils' attainment and progress. We discussed the national test results and assessments undertaken by pupils. I also looked at the school's published information on the website, as well as minutes of governing body meetings and information about attendance, behaviour and safety.