

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Faye Anderson
Tor Bridge Primary School
Miller Way
Estover
Plymouth
Devon
PL6 8UN

Dear Faye Anderson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Tor Bridge Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 to 10 July 2019, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2018.

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

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in October 2018.

- Rapidly improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the governing body secures leadership capacity in the school at all levels
 - leaders provide governors with the information they need to evaluate the school's effectiveness, including the impact of pupil premium funding
 - the school's curriculum is sufficiently challenging and curriculum requirements are met fully
 - leaders' checks on teaching are thorough and teachers act on leaders' advice so that pupils who have previously underachieved catch up quickly and pupils' outcomes are improved rapidly
 - middle leaders have the skills and knowledge they need to support teachers in planning work to eradicate pupils' prior underachievement in English and mathematics
 - operational leadership of the school day, including the timetabling of lessons and the management of pupils' behaviour, is effective
 - school policies are adhered to by all staff, and teachers' expectations of pupils in lessons, at social times and around school are consistently high
 - disadvantaged pupils, the middle-attaining and the most able pupils make consistently good progress
 - leaders' self-evaluation of whole-school effectiveness is accurate.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - the teaching of reading prepares pupils well for their next stage of education
 - teachers' assessment is accurate and used to inform teaching consistently well
 - teachers plan work that meets pupils' needs so that middle-attaining and the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged are challenged appropriately in writing and mathematics
 - teaching in early years is consistently good, assessment is accurate, and provision is matched closely to children's academic and emotional needs.
- Improve the quality of personal development and welfare urgently by ensuring that:
 - teaching motivates and interests pupils so that pupils' wilful and persistent disruptions to lessons are minimised and pupils consistently apply their best effort to their learning

- learning time is used to its full extent across the day.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 9 July 2019 to 10 July 2019

Evidence

The inspector met with the acting headteacher, the externally commissioned special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and the leader of mathematics. Discussions were held with the head of education from the local authority, a headteacher of another school supporting this school, and two members of the interim executive board. The inspector also talked with staff and pupils. The inspector evaluated the progress made against recommendations identified in the previous inspection report.

The inspector observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at social times and conducted visits to classrooms to observe pupils' progress and their attitudes to learning. Pupils' work across a range of subjects and year groups was scrutinised. A range of other documentation was looked at, including the school's action plan, minutes of the interim executive board and records of local authority monitoring visits. The inspectors checked a wide range of information about safeguarding, and the school's single central record of checks on staff recruitment.

Context

There have been significant changes in staffing since the school was deemed to require special measures in October 2018. At the end of the Autumn term, the headteacher resigned and the deputy headteacher was appointed to be acting headteacher in January 2019. She is supported by a headteacher from another local school.

In addition, the leader of English left the school and the SENCo relinquished her role. As a result, there is no middle leadership capacity within the school at present. External support has been commissioned from another local school, and this includes a consultant SENCo who works with the school for one day a week. Several teachers have left the school, and this turbulence in staffing persists.

Although the local governing body remains in place, the overall responsibility for the school has been assumed by an interim executive board. This arrangement will continue until the school completes the planned academisation process.

The recommended external review of the school's use of the additional pupil premium funding took place in March 2019.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The work of the acting headteacher, supported by the local authority and the headteacher of another school, has been successful in halting a further decline in standards. The acting headteacher has worked with determination and resilience,

providing important stability and continuity, despite a continuing context of staff upheaval.

The commissioning of support from another headteacher by the local authority has been a positive decision. He has started to support leaders and teachers to develop their skills as he has the necessary experience to provide the guidance required. This work has centred on ensuring that self-evaluation is accurate and honest, as well as assisting leaders to evaluate the impact of their actions. This has resulted in improvements to pupils' attitudes to learning and some improvement in the planning of teaching. However, the impact of the actions taken remains at a superficial level and there is modest evidence to suggest they have led to the deep-rooted change needed to secure sustained and rapid improvement in the longer term.

Initial work with the headteacher of another school has been instrumental in ensuring that the daily running of the school and the use of time is more effective. The changes made to the timetable have maximised learning time. Pupils say that they 'do more things in a day' than was previously the case.

However, there is still considerable work to do to develop the curriculum fully. This has been hampered by the fact that, while the arrangements are being made for the school to join a multi-academy trust, the school has not been able to appoint substantive replacements to key leadership posts.

Leaders now have an increasingly accurate understanding of the quality of education the school provides. This has been supported by the development of teachers' tracking of the progress that pupils make. Although this is at an early stage of development, it has already enabled leaders to identify where there are signs of improvements. Most importantly, there is confidence that this information can be used for strategic decisions in the future. The reliability of this information is further endorsed by external validation and moderation with the partner school.

Members of the interim executive board have the necessary skills and expertise, together with the commitment, to make the changes needed. They recognise the trust and loyalty that parents have for the school and understand their responsibility to meet these expectations.

Their initial focus has been to finalise plans for the school's future and to ensure that there is support in place for staff during the period of transition. They are regularly and reliably informed about the work that is taking place through the local authority adviser, the acting headteacher and the supporting headteacher. They challenge and ask probing questions and understand the reasons why there is some slippage from the agreed milestones outlined in the action plan. They, too, share a frustration that the issues in staffing have not been resolved. While they agree that improvement has not been fast enough, they remain resolute in their ambition for the school, the pupils and the community.

The part-time SENCo has identified the nature and extent of the support required and has sought to improve communication with parents and partnership with external professionals.

She is knowledgeable about how best to meet pupils' social and emotional needs and understands that this needs to be more closely linked to pupils' academic progress. There is evidence that interventions are leading to improvements in the short-term, but there is not yet a coherent and integrated approach to evaluating the impact of the actions taken.

The SENCo works with staff so that they understand their responsibility to set appropriate targets and adapt their planning to meet the needs of pupils. Teaching assistants provide support for pupils but tasks and targets are not always precisely matched to pupils' starting points. Therefore, pupils are sometimes not able to access work at the right level or do not have a clear idea of what they are trying to achieve.

The work to support disadvantaged pupils is not yet having a strong impact. The recent review of this additional funding has highlighted the areas that need to be tackled. The acting headteacher has started to work with staff to reflect on the research behind the strategies that are considered to be effective for this group of pupils. Beyond this awareness-raising, there is limited knowledge about the academic progress that pupils are making. This prevents the development of strategic plans. There is a strong emphasis on the pastoral support provided for such pupils but less emphasis on their academic needs. Teachers' planning is not astute enough to recognise and overcome barriers to learning. Governors have not yet scrutinised the action plan formulated after the review.

Safeguarding continues to be effective. There have been changes made to safeguarding processes during the year when issues have been raised. The departure of the headteacher, who was one of the designated safeguarding leaders, has meant that the acting headteacher has trained to fulfil this responsibility alongside the family support adviser.

Staff training is in place and all staff are aware of how to report safeguarding concerns. Leaders make the statutory checks and follow government guidelines to ensure that staff are safe to work with children. The single central register is up to date and records all the necessary information.

Leaders seek advice and work with external agencies to support pupils who are at risk. However, when referrals are made, leaders are not always persistent enough in following up concerns to check that agreed actions have been taken.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There have been some improvements to the quality of teaching and learning due to the regular support provided by the partner school. The monitoring of the quality of classroom practice has shown that planning is more consistent and that the level of pupils' engagement is positive. Classroom displays show the journey of pupils' learning, and this also serves to increase pupils' pride in what they can achieve. Nonetheless, there remain significant challenges to improving the quality of teaching and the effective use of assessment, overall, including in the early years foundation stage.

There have been some improvements made to the teaching of mathematics. Teachers are clearer about the sequence of pupils' learning and therefore there is appropriate coverage of the key concepts. A recent school audit has shown that pupils are not confident in their skills of problem-solving and reasoning. This was also evidenced in the work scrutiny completed during the inspection. These findings will inform the plan of action for the new academic year.

Where teaching is effective, pupils write for a variety of audiences and purposes, with increased stamina and skill. Teachers use engaging stimuli to encourage pupils to shape their ideas. Pupils develop an understanding of different genres, such as how to use rhetorical techniques for persuasive tasks. The most able writers extend the quality of their descriptive writing, using figurative language. Pupils say that they enjoy the work they do in a range of subjects across the curriculum, including technology and music. They understand and use complex subject vocabulary, particularly in science.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a focus on reading to extend pupils' vocabulary, to introduce pupils to high-quality texts and to encourage reading for enjoyment. The library is at the centre of the school with quotations from popular children's books displayed on the walls. Pupils say that there is a wide selection of books available. They enjoy the reading scheme, which they say has widened the scope of their choices.

Where teaching is not effective, teachers are not sufficiently skilled in adapting their teaching to meet the needs of pupils. Teachers do not routinely use assessment to highlight pupils' misconceptions and remedy them. Therefore, pupils continue to make similar, and often fundamental mistakes, particularly in the accuracy of calculation, spelling and punctuation. This hinders their subsequent progress.

Pupils are not yet routinely supported to overcome the legacy of weaker teaching, particularly in their understanding of phonics. This is reflected in pupils' application of this knowledge in spelling. Teachers identify the work that pupils have missed due to absence, but there is not a consistent approach to how pupils can catch up with the work missed.

Where teachers provide guidance, this can sometimes be of limited value as it is not clear whether pupils have understood and can apply these skills independently. Teachers' advice is not well matched to the most able pupils' starting points. At times, tasks limit pupils' scope to demonstrate a higher level of skill. Teachers identify what pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) find difficult but not how they can be supported to access the tasks.

The local authority has provided considerable support to improve the quality of the early years phase. This has resulted in improvements, particularly in the layout of the learning environment, in the learning atmosphere and in the range of activities provided. However, there is a lack of coherence in the tracking of children's learning and a lack of clarity about their progress. Activities are not aligned closely enough to learning objectives to identify whether children have achieved the purpose of the exercise or not.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school is a positive place to be and the interactions between pupils, and between pupils and staff, reflect this. Social time is pleasant and good-natured. Pupils play well together and are supervised by teachers in the well-equipped play area. Pupils describe their school as 'caring', 'inclusive' and 'supportive'. They understand the difference between bullying, thoughtlessness and falling out. They say that bullying is not a prevalent part of their experience at the school. They value their interactions with the pupils who attend the special school, which shares the school's building.

The revisions to the management of behaviour have had a positive impact. Pupils' comments show they recognise the improvements that have been made. They reflect that clear approaches enable them to make positive choices. After an initial spike where higher expectations were being introduced, the number of behaviour referrals and the use of fixed-term exclusions have reduced. The most positive impact has been the reduction in low-level disruption, resulting in classrooms being more conducive to learning. Pupils recognise this, and teachers are now able to use this more settled environment to focus on quality teaching and learning rather than on the management of behaviour.

Pupils talk knowledgeably about the work they have done to understand how to keep themselves safe in the community and when online. They understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and how teachers are supportive of their well-being, particularly when preparing for the assessments at the end of key stage 2.

The work of the family support adviser is effective in engaging and supporting the most vulnerable pupils and their families. The school is involved in some innovative projects with schools across the city. The focus on using extra-curricular involvement to widen pupils' experiences has been successful in developing pupils' skills and engaging them better in the life of the school.

The combination of this work means that pupils have the potential to thrive, in line with improvements to the quality of teaching and learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders do not yet have a regular, detailed and strategic overview of the academic progress that pupils are making. Leaders have introduced a new tracking system to improve this overview, to be ready for the autumn term. The work scrutinised during the inspection, and from the information provided by the school, demonstrates some improvement in outcomes, particularly in key stage 2. However, outcomes in the early years phase remain too low. Leaders recognise that the legacy of weaker teaching persists, and outcomes, overall, are not yet good enough.

External support

A range of external support has been brokered by the local authority. This has included leadership support, additional staffing to increase capacity, and guidance to improve teaching, learning and assessment. The local authority has verified standards in all key stages, including the early years, to ensure that teachers are aware of age-related expectations. Leaders are receptive to this outside scrutiny.

The support of the headteacher of another school has been instrumental in providing the depth of expertise needed. The local authority conducts regular reviews to evaluate the school's effectiveness towards improvement priorities. The conclusions from these visits identify the significant hurdles, particularly in staffing, that leaders still face. The challenge now is to ensure that leaders move beyond this to focus more closely on developing classroom practice and the impact of the actions taken to improve this.