

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 November 2019

Mrs Alexandra Neil
Botley School
Elms Road
Botley
Oxford
Oxfordshire
OX2 9JZ

Dear Mrs Neil

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Botley School

Following my visit to your school on 23 October 2019, 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 February 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions 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 regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2019

- Urgently ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective, by:
 - acting immediately and appropriately in response to any safeguarding concerns
 - recording all safeguarding concerns about pupils and subsequent actions in a secure and well-maintained system.
- Improve the early years provision so that more children achieve a good level of development, by:
 - developing the quality of teaching so that children make the progress of which they are capable
 - ensuring that learning activities are purposeful and are closely matched to children's needs and next steps.
- Enhance pupils' attainment in writing so that it matches the high standards pupils achieve in reading and mathematics.
- Raise expectations and provide a suitable level of challenge for the most able pupils.
- Reduce persistent absence so that more pupils attend school regularly.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 23 October 2019

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, the designated safeguarding officer, a group of staff, two representatives from the local authority and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. The inspector visited some lessons and spoke with a group of pupils. The inspector spoke informally with parents at the start of the day.

Context

Since the last inspection, the headteacher, who was also the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), has left the school. The governing body has temporarily restructured the senior leadership team. One of the school's two assistant headteachers is now acting headteacher. The second assistant headteacher is now acting deputy headteacher. The special educational needs coordinator has been appointed as the new DSL. Plans are in place to appoint a permanent headteacher within the year. Plans are also underway for the school to become an academy within the next few months.

Since the last inspection, the 'Caterpillars' provision for two-year-olds has closed temporarily. The staff from Caterpillars now work in the Nursery.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Leaders have acted urgently to address weaknesses in the school's safeguarding procedures. With the support of the local authority, all safeguarding records have been reviewed and the record-keeping system overhauled. Staff have received training in how to use the new system. As a result, any concerns that staff may have about a pupil are now logged in an orderly and secure way. Leaders review concerns regularly, and access support from external agencies in a more systematic way. Staff know how to check that leaders have acted on their concerns, and what to do should they feel concerns need more urgent action.

There is a much-improved culture of safeguarding across the whole school. There is an 'it could happen here' approach that helps everyone to be vigilant and to put pupils' interests first. Senior leaders have renewed their safeguarding and safer recruitment training. Staff and governors have undergone training in all aspects of safeguarding. Leaders check that staff have understood what they have been taught. Governors' monitoring of safeguarding is more thorough than in the past. They know how well systems are working and how to dig deeper to check that the culture of safeguarding is strong.

Leaders are making improvements in the early years setting. A thorough programme of training for teachers and teaching assistants is helping staff to improve their skills. Classrooms and outdoor spaces have been reorganised so that they match children's needs and interests. Leaders keep a close eye on how children are developing in the different areas of the curriculum. They adapt their plans to help children access the areas they are not so confident in. There are more consistently positive relationships between adults and children. As a result, children appear interested in the activities they are doing, and there is a friendly atmosphere. Teachers have made some recent changes to how they teach phonics and make sure children learn to read. Senior leaders and governors are starting to check that these changes are working so that children make strong progress.

At the time of the last inspection, teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes were judged to be good. Parents agreed. However, inspectors noted that pupils' writing was not as strong as it should be. Inspectors also found that sometimes the most able pupils were not challenged to achieve as highly as they could. Leaders' work to address these areas is in its early stages. Some improvements in writing have been made, as seen by the increased outcomes for pupils who left Year 6 last summer. Leaders are now starting to focus on making further improvements to writing and for the most able pupils in mathematics. They are using expert advice from the local authority to help raise pupils' outcomes further. Teachers are starting to trial some new ideas for teaching in the classroom. Leaders have wisely begun a programme to monitor how well these new ideas are working, although it is too early to see the impact of their work. Leaders wisely plan to focus on making sure they are improving outcomes for the most able pupils. They also recognise that it is particularly important to ensure that any changes to the teaching of mathematics are well thought through.

The school's plans for improving the wider curriculum are in the early stages of development. Staff groups have been set up to focus on different curriculum areas. They are wisely starting to consider how to organise subjects so that pupils progress through the curriculum in an organised way, building knowledge in different subjects over the time they are in school. Staff are receptive to the new ideas and excited to further develop the curriculum.

Leaders are successfully improving pupils' attendance. They are using a range of actions, including making it clear to parents that they should not take holidays during the school term. Leaders have a more organised and proactive approach to checking pupils' attendance. They put support in place for pupils and their families who are at risk of becoming persistently absent. Pupils told the inspector that they like celebrating high attendance during assemblies. Last year, fewer pupils were persistently absent than in the past.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

The changes that governors have made to the leadership structure have added to the capacity of the school to improve. New leaders have made sure that staff work hard to improve the safeguarding culture of the school. Rightly, leaders also continue to celebrate and maintain the good teaching and outcomes in the school. Parents remain positive about the school's performance. Several told the inspector that their children are learning well and feel safe in school.

After the last inspection, leaders and governors recognised that urgent changes were necessary to the school, especially to safeguarding procedures. They have shown determination in tackling the areas of weakness found. The local authority has played a crucial role in supporting the school to improve. The statement of action it produced is fit for purpose. The school uses this alongside their own improvement plans to check that they are working on the right things to improve the school. This is working well. Additional plans are helping to ensure that safeguarding remains a top priority.

Governors are mindful of leaders' workload. They understand the need to ensure that improvements are sustainable and become part of the embedded culture of the school. They are managing carefully and sensibly the process of the school becoming an academy.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders and governors have introduced improved systems for organising and monitoring their work. At all levels, there is now stronger accountability in the school.
- Leaders and governors are very reflective. They are willing to engage with the process of change and welcome the external help they are receiving from the local authority and other partners.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Initially, and necessarily, leaders' checking has focused on whether new systems are being used. They now need to make sure that their monitoring focuses on how effectively changes are working to improve pupils' progress and to keep pupils safe.

External support

A range of support for the school has been brokered by the local authority. This includes using safeguarding experts to monitor improvements in safeguarding, and subject experts to help the school improve the early years, English and mathematics. The local authority's intensive work has been highly effective in

helping the school improve.