

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Elizabeth Gallagher
Elms Farm Community Primary School
Dorncliffe Avenue
Sheldon
Birmingham
West Midlands
B33 0PJ

Dear Mrs Gallagher

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Elms Farm Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 December 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- further develop subject leaders' action plans so that they more closely reference the impact of their actions to improve the quality of education, particularly in English and mathematics
- ensure that all foundation subject leaders monitor the quality of education in their subjects so that they can use this information to bring about further improvements.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy head teacher and the English and mathematics subject leaders. I also met with three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I reviewed minutes of the local governing body meetings, curriculum plan and records of monitoring activities. I also looked at work in pupils' books and spoke to pupils about their work.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have restructured staffing at the school. This has resulted in several changes to teaching and support staff. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2018. Currently, staffing is stable and there are no vacant posts at the school.

Main findings

Leaders, including governors, and all staff are united in their aim to improve the quality of education at the school. With input from pupils leaders have launched new school values to reflect their vision. These are; ambition, community and equality.

Senior leaders have successfully worked together to bring about improvement at the school since it was inspected. The overarching school improvement plan is focused clearly on what the school needs to do to become good. The plan has a tight focus on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, and includes the key priorities for all aspects of provision at the school. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and what needs further improvement. This is because they receive regular reports from the headteacher and termly presentations from the English and mathematics leaders about the impact of their work. The chair of governors is present when monitoring visits carried out by the school's priority partner from the local authority. Governors provide appropriate challenge and support for leaders and are mindful of the workload of staff.

The leaders of English and mathematics benefit from working alongside specialist external consultants and the school's deputy headteacher to ensure that their individual plans for improvement focus on the correct areas. These leaders have strong subject knowledge and share this well with staff through training. Their plans include specific actions, to be completed within appropriate timescales, that are matched to the school's key priorities. These plans do not currently contain sufficiently precise information about the intended impact of their work.

Some foundation subject leaders have started to monitor the quality of education in their subjects. They use this information to inform their action plans. However, this

is not yet happening in all foundation subjects. As a result, leaders do not know well enough, how well pupils are doing in some subjects across the curriculum.

Leaders have made changes to how they monitor teaching and how they check how well pupils are learning. Leaders carry out a range of activities so that they have an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of education in several subjects, including English and mathematics, throughout the school. Leaders use this information well to inform professional development for teachers and teaching assistants. This includes bespoke training and support where individual needs are identified. As a result, there is now greater consistency in the quality of teaching, particularly in English and mathematics across the school. Leaders' plans to address any remaining weaknesses are appropriate.

Leaders have refined the way that assessment is used. They hold half termly discussions with individual teachers about the pupils in their class. The focus is now on any barriers that are preventing pupils from making progress towards the standards of which they are capable in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have raised teachers' expectations of what all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, can achieve. There is a much tighter focus, than in the past, on the progress that pupils have made since the last key stage. Leaders track the progress of disadvantaged pupils separately. They use the pupil premium funding effectively to provide additional support for learning when pupils are at risk of falling behind. There are signs of improvement in pupils' achievement. Last year, by the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress in reading and mathematics was in line with national average. However, progress in writing was not as strong.

Pupils' English and topic books show that there are plenty of purposeful opportunities to write at length. This is linked to the current topic. For example, Year 6 pupils composed diary entries as passengers on the Titanic. Year 2 pupils wrote about famous artists and their work. Other writing is linked to class novels. Teachers have high expectations of the language that pupils will use in their writing and how they will vary the structure of sentences. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The most able pupils are well challenged to use a wide range of ambitious, highly appropriate vocabulary. Most pupils present their work well. Pupils' books show that tasks are matched to pupils' needs and abilities. Learning around grammar, punctuation and spelling is appropriate to the year group. However, some pupils continue to make repeated errors with basic punctuation or common spellings, although this is becoming less frequent. This affects some pupils' chances of reaching the standards of which they are capable.

The school has become part of a Maths Hub Teaching for Mastery programme since the last inspection. Leaders and teachers have benefited from subject-specific training that has improved their subject knowledge. This has significantly raised teachers' expectations of what all pupils can do. Pupils' books show that there is consistency in how mathematics is taught across the school. There are daily opportunities for pupils to practise and refine calculation strategies. There are also

regular opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge when reasoning and solving mathematical problems.

There is more to do to ensure that the most able pupils are consistently well challenged. Sometimes, these pupils have to complete tasks that they find too easy. This prevents some of them reaching the more difficult tasks that have been planned for them. This means that some pupils are not able to deepen their knowledge as well as they could.

Leaders have implemented a wide range of strategies to try to improve pupils' attendance. There is a relentless focus on ensuring that pupils attend school every day. As a result, there has been a significant improvement in the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent. However, despite leaders' best efforts, the overall attendance of pupils at the school remains below where it should be. Leaders work closely with professionals in the local safeguarding partnership so that the well-being of vulnerable pupils who have poor attendance is checked regularly.

External support

Leaders have engaged well with the support provided by external partners. This includes the priority partner, commissioned by the local authority. The priority partner makes monthly visits to review the school's progress against the improvement plan. The priority partner has an accurate view of the school and provides appropriate challenge that leaders respond well too. Leaders have also sought support from local schools, which has been effective in improving the quality of education in English and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Jo Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector