

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



14 June 2021

Anna Stevenson
Birches Green Junior School
Birches Green Road
Erdington
Birmingham
West Midlands
B24 9SR

Dear Mrs Stevenson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Birches Green Junior School

Following my visit with Chris Pollitt, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and Lesley Yates, HMI, to your school on 11 and 12 May 2021, 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first routine monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in July 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

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

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

The school's improvement plans are 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 interim executive board (IEB), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first routine monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 May 2021

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in July 2019, there have been some significant staff changes. In January 2020, the headteacher of Birches Green Infants School was appointed as interim headteacher. In December 2020, several teachers left and new staff joined. A new leader for special educational needs and a new curriculum leader have been appointed. The governing body has been replaced by an IEB, and this is still in place. In 2019, the school was made subject to an academy order, but this has not yet been actioned. In the meantime, the school has established a working partnership with Birches Green Infant School. A previous section 8 additional inspection in February 2021 judged that leaders and those responsible for governance were taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

During this inspection, a concern arose that gave inspectors cause to examine aspects of safeguarding; specifically, the procedures for recording and reporting accidents in school. Currently, the school's accident records do not record injuries and treatment in sufficient detail, or the information reported to parents if required. Furthermore, the arrangements for storing and managing medicines in school are not tight enough. Leaders know what should happen and policy documents are fit for purpose. However, in more than one instance, staff were unsure about their roles and responsibilities. Some medicines are not kept in the right place and record-keeping is not as robust as it should be. While leaders have strengthened many aspects of safeguarding, these current shortcomings have the potential to put pupils at risk. Consequently, the school's safeguarding arrangements are ineffective at this time.

In response to the areas identified for improvement by the previous section 5 inspection, leaders are taking effective action to improve the quality of education. Working closely with the two assistant headteachers, the interim headteacher has established new systems that help everyone to understand expectations. Staff now receive regular feedback about their work and its impact on pupils' learning. The majority of staff welcome this new direction and believe that pupils are learning more than they used to. Inspection evidence confirms that leaders have brought new ambition and that curriculum development is heading the right way. There are many improvements to celebrate, yet there are still some significant aspects to strengthen.

At all levels, staff training and accountability have increased. Staff have a greater understanding of whole-school priorities and are more involved in curriculum development. Subject leaders now have more responsibility for overseeing planning.

Elsewhere, fresh leadership of pupil premium spending is also making its mark. The school now targets this additional funding to make sure disadvantaged pupils have more opportunities to make the most of what the school offers, both in class and through extra-curricular activities.

In all classes, pupils read regularly and have access to some good-quality texts. There are daily routines that help pupils to gain a sense of achievement and to enjoy books and stories. Any pupils who need extra support with learning to read receive extra sessions to give them a boost. Further phonics training would help all class-based staff to support these pupils more effectively.

Currently, the school is guiding pupils to improve their handwriting and build up stamina for writing at length, which slipped during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Across the school, the quality of writing is still very mixed but there is a consistent approach to improving standards and work in books shows improvement over time.

Similarly, in mathematics, pupils have gaps in their knowledge. In the main, these are caused by previous weaknesses in curriculum planning, although the disruption caused by COVID-19 has also hindered progress. As with English, the leadership of mathematics has brought more ambition to curriculum design and this is lifting aspirations. Even so, classroom practice still varies too much and standards remain low.

In other subjects, curriculum plans have been revamped to provide more guidance about what is taught and when. These plans also identify a range of enriching experiences that aim to enhance pupils' learning and broaden their horizons. This is most certainly a step in the right direction, but there is still more to do. These plans could now be improved further so that learning in different subjects builds more securely and logically on what has gone before. Currently, staff have identified the broad topics to be covered and the things that pupils should be able to do during each topic. Staff have also considered the sequencing of learning. In history, for example, they have chosen to cover different periods in chronological order whenever possible. However, leaders and staff have not given enough thought to the crucial knowledge and concepts that pupils should know, understand and remember. Instead, there is an overemphasis on developing generic skills that are not rooted in subject-specific knowledge. This means that pupils do not necessarily understand what they are doing or see how it links with previous learning.

The leadership of special educational needs has recently changed and oversight of provision is developing. Already, there are some increasingly effective systems for supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Looking ahead, leaders intend to make closer checks on the impact of this support in order to improve it further.

The school's procedures for monitoring attendance are well thought through and work as they should. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, and since the reopening of

the school to all pupils, staff have kept a watchful eye on pupils' attendance and engagement with learning. Staff are quick to challenge poor attendance and work with other agencies when needs be. That said, pupils' punctuality in the mornings could be better.

The IEB provides a clear-sighted vision and strategic direction. As such, governance is much improved and presents very well. Records from IEB meetings show that the board receives information about the school's progress against key priority areas and asks many questions.

Overall, leaders have brought about many improvements, but weaknesses in safeguarding exist and need urgent attention.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Staff knowledge of the school's procedures for the recording and reporting of accidents and the management of medicines in school must be increased in order to improve the culture of safeguarding in the school.

Additional support

The school's leadership values the advisory support brokered through the local authority. School leaders and the IEB have received regular written reports about the school's progress, which they have found helpful.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, members of the IEB and a school improvement partner. Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's staff and parent questionnaires, looked at work in pupils' books and visited lessons.