

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Kate Fiddler
Headteacher
Shenley Primary School
London Road
Shenley
Radlett
Hertfordshire
WD7 9DX

Dear Miss Fiddler

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Shenley Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 May 2021, 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(2) 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.

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

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that teachers have a secure knowledge of the subjects they teach so that pupils in all year groups achieve well across the curriculum.

Context

The recent partial closure of schools, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has delayed your plans for the development of subjects across the curriculum. Leaders have also delayed their plans for the introduction of a new phonics programme.

Since the previous full inspection, you have completed a restructure of the leadership team and support staff. Your team now includes a deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs coordinator. There are new phase leaders of the lower and upper school. The team also includes a leader of the early years. There have been changes to the governing body. Apart from the chair of governors, most governors are new to their role. The body also includes an experienced governor who also works for the local authority's governance services.

Main findings

Despite the challenges of a restructure of staffing and the COVID-19 pandemic, you have remained resolute in your focus on school improvement. Leaders are making the changes necessary to improve the school. You have an accurate understanding of what needs to be done. This is understood by staff, including those who are new to their roles.

Since the previous inspection, you have reviewed your systems for checking how well teachers deliver the curriculum. You have identified where staff require further support. As a result, teachers have a better understanding of leaders' expectations. Not all teachers have a secure understanding of the subjects they teach. Pupils' misconceptions are not addressed in a timely manner.

Some subject leaders are new to their roles. They have received training to help them carry out their responsibilities. Not all subject plans have been developed. Some do not identify the most important things pupils need to learn or a clear order of what teachers need to teach and when.

In some subjects, such as mathematics, leaders have identified gaps in pupils' knowledge following pupils' return to school. Leaders have modified their plans to help teachers address these gaps in an effective way. This means that pupils are getting back on track in their learning.

Curriculum plans also identify important vocabulary. This means pupils speak confidently about their learning. For example, Year 4 pupils remembered what they had learned about electricity. They can use terms such as insulators, conductors and the flow of currents.

The introduction of the new phonics programme has been delayed due to the impact of COVID-19. Leaders have completed a review of the books for pupils who are starting to read. Books are now well matched to the sounds pupils know. There

is a consistent approach to teaching early reading. However, some pupils have fallen behind with their phonics skills. They do not receive enough timely support to help them catch up quickly.

Older pupils are becoming more successful in understanding how to retrieve information and meaning from texts. The refurbishment of the library, along with classroom book corners, provide a wider range of reading materials that pupils are accessing. Pupils' enjoyment of reading is promoted effectively through daily story times, reading challenges and competitions.

Leaders are well supported by governors. New governors have undertaken training so that they are able to check the work of leaders and monitor the impact of their actions carefully. Some of their visits have been limited by the pandemic. They have sought different ways to gather information about the school's improvement. Their challenge is focused on the school's priorities.

Additional support

Leaders have used the help of external partners well. They have benefited from a range of support from the local authority. This has included support with financial and personnel issues, as well as developing expertise in the curriculum. English and mathematics advisers have regularly supported the school. The Hertfordshire improvement partner provides timely advice to help guide leaders' improvement work.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also reviewed a range of documentation, including your evaluation of the school, the school improvement plans, minutes of the governing body and school curriculum plans.

As part of the inspection, I considered 58 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as six additional free-text messages. I looked at 16 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Along with you and other leaders, we visited lessons and looked at pupils' books.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector