

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Pete Higgins
Heathlands Primary Academy
Heath Way
Castle Bromwich
Birmingham
West Midlands
B34 6NB

Dear Mr Higgins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heathlands Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 15 June 2021 with Heather Fearn, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), 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 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school 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:

- refine curriculum content so that the precise knowledge that staff want pupils to learn is set out with clarity and coherence from early years to Year 6

- ensure curriculum improvement plans take account of early years and recognise it as the start of the curriculum
- provide staff with further support to enhance their subject knowledge
- promote a culture of reading for pleasure by ensuring the novels and texts that pupils read are suitably ambitious.

Context

The school's leadership and staff remain largely unchanged since the last section 5 inspection.

Since Ofsted's last monitoring visit, staff have successfully welcomed pupils back to school. Staff have carefully assessed pupils' needs and established any necessary additional support. Leaders report that most pupils have managed the transition back to learning at school well.

At the time of the inspection, no pupils were isolating or being educated remotely. Pupils' attendance has returned to the levels that the school was recording prior to the pandemic.

Main findings

Since the last section 5 inspection, leaders have worked with colleagues across the University of Wolverhampton multi-academy trust (UWMAT), to strengthen the curriculum in all subjects. They have focused on giving greater prominence to the wider curriculum. Subject leaders have received training and support from networks across the trust. This is helping them consider what knowledge they want pupils to learn and remember.

This work marks an important step for the school. Subjects like history, geography, and physical education (PE) now have a higher profile. Teachers have been given time to think much more carefully about what they teach and why. However, leaders recognise that there is further work to do. Some plans are complex and detailed. This detail makes it hard to appreciate what content is most important and must be remembered by pupils for future learning. When leaders have further clarified the precise knowledge that they want pupils to know and remember, they will be better placed to consider how this is assessed.

Subject leaders and staff require additional support to secure further curriculum improvements. COVID-19 has hampered some of the support for staff that had been planned for the last year. UWMAT now have plans in place to begin a new wave of staff training before the end of the summer term. Senior leaders have arranged for subject leaders to meet with other colleagues across the trust. While

this support is timely, leaders recognise that adequate specialist advice will also need to be on hand. Some subject leaders are either new to post or are leading areas that they do not have a significant background in.

The school's early years team has a clear vision for the curriculum they are building for the youngest learners in the school. Staff have worked with teachers in Year 1 to think carefully about the curriculum. They have plotted the knowledge that children will first learn in early years and build upon in key stage 1. Some of this work has been interrupted by COVID-19 but is well underway. The early years leader recognises Nursery and Reception as the bedrock of everything to come. Staff have adopted a sensible approach to assessment and are focused on creating as much time as possible for teaching. However, school improvement plans do not fully reflect these early years ambitions. Without identifying this work within improvement plans, leaders will not be able to fully check the impact of their actions.

The teaching of early reading is effective. The school has a well-established programme for teaching phonics. All staff are trained and receive expert support from the school's reading leader. The weakest readers are carefully monitored. Teachers were able to continue teaching phonics throughout the last period of remote learning. Pupils read books that are matched to the sounds they are learning. However, some of the texts selected by pupils and included within the school's English lessons, could be even more ambitious.

Staff have established a system to ensure that any vulnerable pupils are quickly identified. Leaders work closely with external agencies to make sure that pupils get any help that they need. This help has included supporting families manage the challenges of the last year.

The school's leaders are receptive and hard working. Staff who responded to our questionnaire say that pupils are safe in school. Similarly, all staff feel that the school has a culture that encourages calm and orderly conduct and is aspirational for all pupils.

The school has devised new plans to respond to the disruption caused by COVID-19. These plans include prioritising elements of English and mathematics. Plans are detailed and include relevant actions and outcomes for each class. The school's wider plans are also appropriate. However, leaders know that the further development of the wider curriculum is now a key priority. The development of subjects should also take full account of how learning starts in the early years.

Additional support

UWMAT has established a programme of support for leaders (including subject leaders). This is helping them to develop in their roles. This work has been a priority and has progressed despite the challenges of the last year. However, elements of the support, like establishing subject networks and securing specialist support, now have scope to go further.

Governors understand the priorities that have been identified for improving the quality of education. They have attended additional training and identified someone with responsibility for curriculum. Governors continued to meet remotely throughout the lockdowns. They are keen to take the next steps with the curriculum and are considering how they can make further use of the subject expertise within the trust.

Leaders are pleased with the impact that external support is having upon their improvement work. They have requested support from other local leaders to help them monitor the impact of their actions on the curriculum and other key areas.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the executive headteacher and chief executive officer of UWMAT, the school business manager, pupils from a range of year groups, and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

We also met with subject leaders, the early years leader and English leader, took account of pupils' work and visited lessons. We reviewed the school's single central register and considered systems and processes for managing safeguarding with one of the school's designated safeguarding leads and the head of pastoral care. We took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 14 free-text responses, and 24 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of UWMAT, 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

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector

