

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



10 September 2021

Angela Hill
Executive Headteacher
Palfrey Junior School
Dale Street
Walsall
West Midlands
WS1 4AH

Dear Mrs Hill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Palfrey Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 30 June 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:

- identify the precise content that staff want pupils to remember and draw upon as they progress through each subject curriculum
- liaise with colleagues in feeder schools so that leaders can fully appreciate how content fits together and what learning looks like over time
- enhance staff expertise in the teaching of phonics and bolster the tracking and assessment of pupils' progress through the new programme.

Context

Leaders have risen to the challenges of the last year. Despite the significant impact of COVID-19 on the school and its community, staff remain positive and united. As a result of highly effective support, pupils' attendance has quickly returned to average levels for the school.

COVID-19 has significantly interrupted the teaching of reading. Staff have found that a high proportion of pupils joining the school in Year 3 have gaps in their phonics skills. These gaps are being addressed but there is more work to do.

The staffing structure remains broadly the same since the school's last inspection. Palfrey continues to benefit from its membership of the Cadmus federation.

Main findings

The executive headteacher and heads of school are a receptive and capable team. They are aware of the areas requiring further development and have adjusted plans to highlight these priorities. For example, they know that the teaching and monitoring of the new phonics programme must be strengthened.

Leaders have continued their development of the curriculum. Subject leaders have devised progression documents that set out the learning challenges they plan for pupils. These documents, along with more detailed plans that explain how learning links from year to year, are helping staff have greater clarity about what it is they want pupils to know. However, leaders acknowledge that these plans could be even more precise. As a result, staff have recently begun to identify what they call 'sticky knowledge'. This 'sticky knowledge' represents the golden nuggets of curriculum content that leaders want pupils to remember as they encounter new learning.

Leaders have also strengthened their relationship with feeder schools. This is helping leaders have greater clarity about curriculum content in early years and key stage 1. This is particularly the case for English and mathematics. However, in some curriculum areas, such as history, geography and music, information about what pupils learn before they join the school is not as clear. This can make it more

challenging for the staff to explain precisely how content fits together and what learning looks like over time.

Staff have identified that a significant proportion of pupils who are joining the school have gaps in their early reading skills. To respond to this rise in gaps, leaders have adopted a new phonics programme. The books that pupils read in this programme are matched to the sounds that they are learning. The school has invested in a new bank of resources. It is clear that the programme is having a positive impact. In a short time, pupils are already catching up. However, expertise in the teaching of phonics is currently limited to a small number of staff. The demand for expertise in this important curriculum area is likely to continue. Staff expertise will need to match this demand. Furthermore, while leaders know what sounds pupils are confident in, systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress through the programme could be better.

Subject leaders are passionate about their respective areas of responsibility. They have begun liaising with other subject leads in the federation, though some of this work has been hampered by COVID-19.

Governors have considerable expertise in industry and the education sector. They have gone to some lengths to continue meeting during the periods of lockdown. Their commitment to the school, ways of working and attention to staff well-being have also been recognised by the local authority. Governors know the school well and are committed to securing further improvements.

Leaders and governors have worked very effectively to manage the challenges of COVID-19. They are rightly proud of the school's standing in the local community. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire were very positive about school life. Typical comments from parents during the inspection included: 'Staff are always willing and ready to help if needed' and 'I'm proud to be part of the Palfrey Junior School community.'

Additional support

The school benefits from the wider support of other specialists from across the Cadmus federation. The federation's chief operating officer knows the school well and has offered ongoing support. Leaders appreciate the support available and hope that it can grow further in the future.

Leaders have found support from the adviser appointed by the local authority helpful. The school's adviser has continued to conduct remote visits. Visits have included opportunities for leaders to explore the impact of the improvements they have made to the curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the executive headteacher and two heads of school, the pastoral leader and subject leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I also met with groups of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6 to talk about their learning. Pupils brought along their books to share recent topic work. I heard a number of pupils from Year 3 read.

I met with five members of the governing body and the chief operating officer of the Cadmus federation. I held a telephone conversation with the adviser appointed by the local authority. I took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 17 free-text responses. School leaders also provided me with findings from their recent staff questionnaire.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector